

THE NEW TESTAMENT

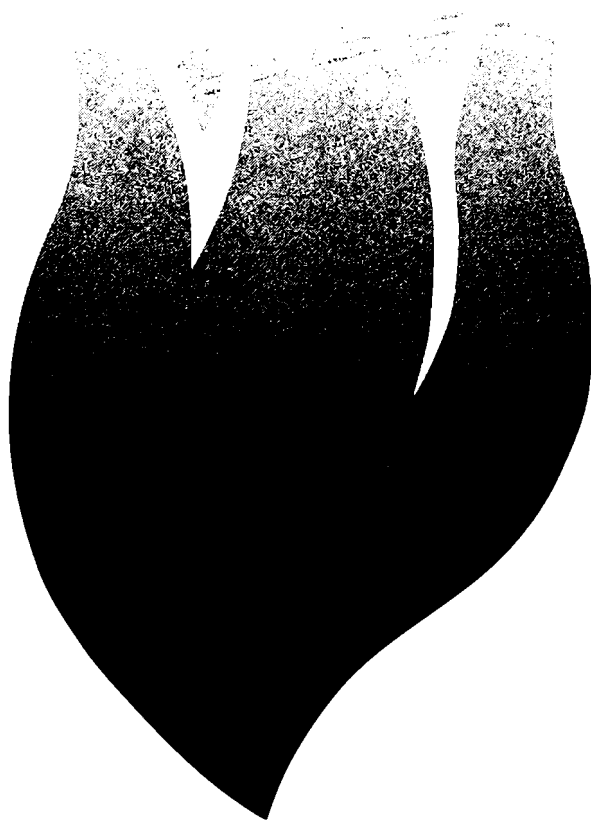
A DEVOTIONAL PARAPHRASE
TO STIMULATE FAITH AND GROWTH



BY JACK J. BLANCO

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NOTE TO THE READER

This is not a new translation, nor is it intended to be used for study or for public readings. Those who are much better qualified than I have supplied us with excellent translations for such purposes. This is a devotional paraphrase and is intended to provide the reader with a new experience, one that will take him to Bethlehem, beside the lake of Galilee, down the dusty roads of Palestine, to Calvary, to the empty tomb, to Jerusalem at Pentecost, and on Paul's missionary journeys. The purpose is to make the reader feel as much as possible as if he or she had personally been there, and yet hear Jesus and others speak as if they were here today.

This paraphrase was begun as a new attempt to enrich my own devotional life and my relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. As I studied each verse, I wrote out by hand what I understood it to mean. And as I wrote, I tried to imagine being with Jesus, Paul, and others and having them speak to me as they would if we met in such places as my office, at home, in church, while shopping, or as we rode together in the car. So this paraphrase reflects my present understanding of the New Testament and what it means to me at this point in my life. Yet, to the best of my ability, I have attempted to be true to the general thought of each verse as I paraphrased and amplified it with insight gained from Bible commentaries, Greek lexicons, various translations, and other study helps.

The original manuscript was shared with family and friends, who urged that it be published and be made available to a wider audience. This led me to take another walk through the New Testament as I made additional corrections and transferred the handwritten material into the computer. Then I shared it with colleagues and others for whose suggestions I am eternally grateful. Prior to its publication, I carefully examined the entire New Testament twice more, and I would like to testify that I stand in awe of its priceless message and of the centrality of Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God who gave His life for me.

So with this paraphrase I share with you a devotional experience which has enriched my own life beyond words. I pray that God through the Holy Spirit may give those of you who prayerfully read it a similar enrichment, and that Jesus Christ will be your Lord and Savior, too.

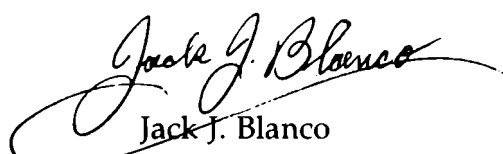
GRATITUDE

Words fail to express my gratitude and appreciation to all who so unselfishly have given of their time and talents to make this publication possible. Without their expertise, this project would never have been completed. Yet, any errors that might appear must fall to my account and not theirs.

Then there are those who have given me the emotional support I needed along the way, encouraging me to carry this task through to completion. I am deeply indebted to them for their encouragement, especially to my children, but most of all to my dear wife. Last, but not least, I wish to thank the sponsors, without whose financial backing the publication of this paraphrase would not have been possible.

In response to such generous support, I wish to dedicate all royalties to a ministerial scholarship to help educate young men and women to carry the good news of the gospel to the ends of the earth and help hasten the day when He whom we love will return.

Sincerely,


Jack J. Blanco

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jack J. Blanco is chairman of the Department of Religion at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists in Collegedale, Tennessee. He received his doctorate in theology from the University of South Africa in 1970, and holds three master's degrees, one in church history from Princeton Theological Seminary, and the other two in applied and systematic theology from the Theological Seminary at Andrews University. He also holds a bachelor's degree in religion from Union College. Prior to his appointment at Southern College, Dr. Blanco served as academic dean at Columbia Union College, dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in the Philippines, chairman of the Bible Department at Solusi College in Zimbabwe, Africa, and associate editor of the *Adventist Review*.

HOW TO USE THIS PARAPHRASE

We have provided various ways to lead the reader into having a more habitual devotional life on a daily basis. One method is to read a chapter a day. Another method is to read the thought-sections as indicated by the dark print of the first word of the verse where each section begins, which may be long or short depending on the narrative or the content. A third method is to follow the listing as given below.

<u>FIRST MONTH</u>		<u>SECOND MONTH</u>		<u>THIRD MONTH</u>	
DAY	JOHN	DAY	MATTHEW	DAY	MARK
1	1:1-1:28	1	5	1	1:1-1:20
2	1:29-1:51	2	6	2	1:21-1:45
3	2	3	7	3	2
4	3	4	8	4	3
5	4:1-4:42	5	9	5	4:1-4:20
6	4:43-4:54	6	10	6	4:21-4:41
7	5	7	11	7	5:1-5:20
8	6:1-6:21	8	12:1-12:37	8	5:21-5:43
9	6:22-6:71	9	12:38-12:50	9	6:1-6:30
10	7:1-7:31	10	13:1-13:23	10	6:31-6:56
11	7:32-7:53	11	13:24-13:58	11	7:1-7:23
12	8:1-8:32	12	14	12	7:24-7:37
13	8:33-8:59	13	15	13	8:1-8:21
14	9	14	16	14	8:22-8:38
15	10	15	17	15	9:1-9:32
16	11:1-11:54	16	18	16	9:33-9:50
17	11:55-12:19	17	19	17	10:1-10:34
18	12:20-12:50	18	20	18	10:35-10:52
19	13	19	21:1-21:27	19	11
20	14	20	21:28-21:46	20	12
21	15	21	22:1-22:46	21	13
22	16	22	22:23-22:46	22	14:1-14:25
23	17	23	23	23	14:26-14:52
24	18	24	24	24	14:53-14:72
25	19	25	25	25	15:1-15:24
26	20	26	26:1-26:35	26	15:25-15:47
27	21	27	26:36-26:56	27	16
		28	26:57-26:75		
	Matthew	29	27:1-27:38		Luke
28	1	30	27:39-27:66	28	1:1-1:38
29	2	31	28	29	1:39-1:80
30	3			30	2:1-2:20
31	4			31	2:21-2:52

<u>FOURTH MONTH</u>		<u>FIFTH MONTH</u>		<u>SIXTH MONTH</u>	
DAY	LUKE	DAY	LUKE	DAY	ROMANS
1	3	1	23:1-13:33	1	1
2	4:1-4:32	2	13:34-23:56	2	2:1-2:16
3	4:33-4:44	3	24:1-24:35	3	2:17-2:29
4	5	4	24:36-24:53	4	3
5	6:1-6:19			5	4
6	6:20-6:49		ACTS	6	5
7	7:1-7:23			7	6
8	7:24-7:50	5	1	8	7
9	8:1-8:25	6	2	9	8:1-8:23
10	8:26-8:56	7	3	10	8:24-8:39
11	9:1-9:27	8	4	11	9
12	9:28-9:62	9	5	12	10
13	10	10	6 & 7	13	11
14	11:1-11:36	11	8	14	12:1-12:9
15	11:37-11:54	12	9	15	12:10-12:21
16	12:1-12:21	13	10	16	13
17	12:22-12:59	14	11	17	14
18	13	15	12	18	15:1-15:13
19	14	16	13	19	15:14-15:33
20	15	17	14	20	16
21	16	18	15		
22	17	19	16		I CORINTHIANS
23	18:1-18:30	20	17		
24	18:31-18:43	21	18	21	1:1-1:9
25	19:1-19:28	22	19	22	1:10-1:25
26	19:29-19:48	23	20	23	1:26-1:31
27	20:1-20:26	24	21	24	2
28	20:27-20:47	25	22	25	3:1-3:9
29	21	26	23	26	3:10-3:23
30	22:1-22:30	27	24	27	4
31	22:31-22:71	28	25	28	5
		29	26	29	6:1-6:11
		30	27	30	6:12-6:20
		31	28	31	7:1-7:19

SEVENTH MONTH

EIGHTH MONTH

NINTH MONTH

DAY 1 CORINTHIANS

DAY 2 CORINTHIANS

DAY PHILIPPIANS

1 7:20-7:40

2 8

3 9:1-9:15

4 9:16-9:27

5 10:1-10:20

6 10:21-10:33

7 11:1-11:22

8 11:23-11:34

9 12:1-12:11

10 12:12-12:31

11 13

12 14:1-14:19

13 14:20-14:31

14 15:1-15:11

15 15:12-15:23

16 15:24-15:32

17 15:33-15:44

18 15:45-15:58

19 16:1-16:14

20 16:15-16:24

2 CORINTHIANS

21 1:1-1:12

22 1:13-1:24

23 2

24 3

25 4

26 5:1-5:9

27 5:10-5:21

28 6:1-6:10

29 6:11-6:18

30 7

31 8:1-8:15

1 8:16-8:24

2 9

3 10:1-10:7

4 10:8-10:18

5 11:1-11:15

6 11:16-11:33

7 12:1-12:10

8 12:11-12:21

9 13

GALATIANS

10 1

11 2

12 3:1-3:14

13 3:15-3:29

14 4:1-4:15

15 4:16-4:31

16 5:1-5:18

17 5:19-5:26

18 6:1-6:10

19 6:11-6:18

EPHESIANS

20 1:1-1:14

21 1:15-1:23

22 1:1-2:10

23 2:11-2:22

24 3:1-3:12

25 3:13-3:21

26 4:1-4:16

27 4:17-4:32

28 5:1-5:16

29 5:17-5:33

30 6:1-6:9

31 6:10-6:24

1 1:1-1:18

2 1:19-1:30

3 2:1-2:18

4 2:19-2:30

5 3:1-3:9

6 3:10-3:23

COLOSSIANS

7 1:1-1:20

8 1:21-1:29

9 2:1-2:15

10 2:16-1:23

11 3:1-3:17

12 3:18-3:25

13 4

1 THESSALONIANS

14 1

15 2:1-2:12

16 2:13-2:20

17 3

18 4

19 5

2 THESSALONIANS

20 1

21 2

22 3

1 TIMOTHY

23 1

24 2

25 3

26 4:1-4:4:9

27 4:10-4:16

28 5:1-5:16

29 5:17-5:25

30 6:1-6:12

31 6:13-6:21

<u>TENTH MONTH</u>		<u>ELEVENTH MONTH</u>		<u>TWELFTH MONTH</u>	
DAY	2 TIMOTHY	DAY	JAMES	DAY	REVELATION
1	1	1	3	1	2:18-2:29
2	2:1-2:14	2	4	2	3:1-3:13
3	2:15-2:26	3	5:1-5:12	3	3:14-3:22
4	3	4	5:13-5:20	4	4
5	4:1-4:8			5	5
6	4:9-4:22		1 PETER	6	6
				7	7:1-8:1
	TITUS	5	1:1-1:16	8	8:2-8:13
		6	1:17-1:25	9	9
7	1	7	2:1-2:16	10	10
8	2	8	2:17-2:25	11	11:1-11:14
9	3	9	3:1-3:17	12	11:15-11:19
10	PHILEMON	10	3:18-4:6	13	12
		11	4:7-4:19	14	13
	HEBREWS	12	5	15	14:1-14:12
				16	14:13-14:20
11	1		2 PETER	17	15
12	2			18	16
13	3	13	1:1-1:15	19	17
14	4	14	1:16-1:21	20	18:1-18:8
15	5	15	2	21	18:9-18:20
16	6	16	3	22	18:21-18:24
17	7			23	19:1-19:10
18	8		1 JOHN	24	19:11-19:21
19	9			25	20:1-20:6
20	10:1-10:22	17	1	26	20:7-20:15
21	10:23-10:39	18	2:1-2:17	27	21:1-21:8
22	11:1-11:31	19	2:18-2:29	28	21:9-21:27
23	11:32-12:3	20	3:1-3:10	29	22:1-22:7
24	12:4-12:17	21	3:11-3:24	30	22:8-22:15
25	12:18-12:29	22	4	31	22:16-22:21
26	13:1-13:8	23	5:1-5:12		
27	13:9-13:25	24	5:13-5:21		
		25	2 JOHN		
	JAMES	26	3 JOHN		
		27	JUDE		
28	1:1-1:15				
29	1:16-1:27		REVELATION		
30	2:1-2:13				
31	2:14-2:26	28	1:1-1:8		
		29	1:9-1:20		
		30	2:1-2:7		
		31	2:8-2:17		

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

CHAPTER 1

1. This book is about the life of Jesus Christ, whose ancestry goes back to David, and then back to Abraham.

2. Now beginning with Abraham down to the time of David we have the following ancestors listed: first there is Abraham, then Isaac, Jacob, and then his son, Judah, with his eleven brothers.

3. After that, we have Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, followed by Hezron, and then Ram.

4. Next came Amminadab, Nahshon, and then Salmon.

5. Salmon and Rahab were the parents of Boaz, and Boaz and Ruth were the parents of Obed, who was the father of Jesse,

6. who in turn was the father of David. This gives us fourteen generations from Abraham to David. Now David and Bathsheba were the parents of Solomon, and as we know, Bathsheba had been the wife of Uriah who was killed in battle.

7. Solomon was followed by Rehoboam, Abijah, and Asa.

8. Next came Jehoshaphat, who was followed by Jehoram and Uzziah.

9. Now Uzziah was followed by Jotham, then by Ahaz, and finally by Hezekiah.

10. Hezekiah's son was Manasseh, who was followed by Amon and then by Josiah.

11. Josiah was followed down the line by Jehoiachin and his brothers, who were deported to Babylon. So there are fourteen generations from David down to the first captives who were taken to Babylon.

12. After Jehoiachin came Shealtiel, and then Zerubbabel.

13. Zerubbabel was followed by Abiud, Eliakim, and Azor.

14. Next came Zadok, Akim, and Eliud,

15. who in turn was followed by Eleazar, Matthan, and Jacob.

16. And Jacob was the father of Joseph, who married Mary, who became the mother of Jesus, whom we recognize as the Messiah.

17. So the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen, and from David to

the Captivity are fourteen, and from the Captivity to the Messiah are fourteen.

18. Now Jesus' birth occurred this way: When His mother, who was called Mary, was engaged to Joseph, and before they were married and had any sexual relations, it was discovered that she was pregnant.

19. When Joseph found out, he couldn't believe it. But he still loved Mary, so he made plans to protect her from public scorn as much as possible, first, by breaking off their engagement and then by sending her away to have her baby somewhere else.

20. Then one night just before he carried out his plans, an angel appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, don't feel disappointed about Mary, but go ahead and marry her. She's still a virgin in spite of what you think. She was made pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit and will give birth to the Messiah.

21. When the baby is born, I want you to call His name Jesus because He is coming to save His people from their sins."

22. Now all this happened just as it was predicted centuries ago when the prophet Isaiah said,

23. "A young woman who is still a virgin will conceive and give birth to the Son of God and He will be like one of us."

24. When Joseph woke up and understood what had happened to Mary, he went ahead and married her.

25. Also, he decided not to have sexual relations with Mary until after God's Son was born. And Joseph named Him Jesus as the angel had told him to do.

CHAPTER 2

1. Now Jesus was born in Bethlehem when Herod the Great was king. And priestly astronomers from the East came to Jerusalem asking,

2. "Where can we find the newborn King? Doesn't anyone here know where He is? For weeks we've been following an unusually bright star in the sky which led us to Jerusalem. And we believe that this supernatural phenomenon indicates that the Deliverer of mankind has finally been

born. We want to be among the first to pay homage to Him and worship Him."

3. When the news reached Herod, he decided that this was a plot to overthrow his government, as did many of his officials.

4. So the first thing he did was to call together the religious leaders and demand an explanation. "Who is this baby King?" he asked. "Where was He born?"

5. The religious leaders told him that they did not know, but that according to Scripture, He was supposed to be born in Bethlehem.

6. Then they showed him Micah's prophecy which said, "Bethlehem, you are not just another small and unimportant town. But you will be the birthplace of the promised Ruler of Israel."

7. Then Herod dismissed the religious leaders and asked the palace guards to find the teachers from the East and bring them to him so that he could talk to them. When they came, he made them welcome and asked them all about their trip, the purpose of their coming, and particularly the time when the star first appeared.

8. When Herod finished visiting with them, he suggested that they go to Bethlehem to find this new-born King and assured them that he would welcome such a Deliverer and that he also would go and worship Him. And he asked them to stop by the palace on their way home to let him know whether they had found the little King or not, and if so, where He was.

9. When these teachers from the East left the palace, they saw that same bright star again and followed it. The star led them to Bethlehem and stopped directly over the house where the parents of the little one-year-old King were now living.

10. The men were joyous and full of gratitude for having found the child.

11. After introducing themselves to Mary and Joseph, they knelt down and worshiped the little King and gave Him presents of gold, costly incense, and expensive perfume.

12. That night God warned them in a dream not to stop at Herod's palace on their return trip. They obeyed and went home another way.

13. That same night an angel spoke to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take Mary and the baby, together with the few things you need, and leave for Egypt. Stay there until I tell you to come back. This is urgent because tomorrow morning Herod will send out troops to find the Baby to kill Him."

14. Joseph got up, packed his saddlebags, put them on the donkey, and in the middle of the night, started out for Egypt with Mary and the Baby.

15. Joseph stayed in Egypt, as he was told to do, until Herod the Great died. Now these things happened just as Hosea the prophet predicted when he spoke for the Lord saying, "I will call my Son back home from the land of Egypt."

16. When Herod realized that the teachers from the East had taken another route home, he became violent. In his rage he sent the palace guards to kill all the babies in and around Bethlehem that were two years old and under, basing his calculations for their age on the time the teachers from the East had said they had first seen the star.

17. This also was according to prophecy. Jeremiah said,

18. "There will come a time when mothers in Israel will be crying and writhing in pain over the murder of their babies and will not be easily consoled because the king's action was heartless and cruel."

19. A short time later Herod the Great died. And an angel spoke to Joseph in a dream and said,

20. "King Herod is dead, so you can now take the mother and the Baby and go back to Israel."

21. Immediately, Joseph packed, took Mary and the Baby, and started for home.

22. When he crossed the border into Israel, he heard that Herod's son, Archelaus, who was even more heartless and cruel than his father had been, was now the new king. Joseph was afraid to settle in Bethlehem or anywhere near Jerusalem again as he had planned. While he was deciding what to do, God spoke to him in a dream and told him not to settle around Jerusalem but to head north and settle in the Galilee area, which Joseph did.

23. So the family settled in the town of Nazareth. This, too, was predicted by several prophets who said, "The Messiah will be called a Nazarene."

CHAPTER 3

1. **Now** when Jesus was a grown man, John the Baptist started his ministry in the wilderness area of Judea not far from Jerusalem.

2. His message was simple: "Repent, because God is ready to set up His kingdom."

3. The preaching of John was a direct fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy when he said, "I hear the voice of a man preaching earnestly in the wilderness saying, 'Prepare the way for the Lord to come, make a smooth road for the King.'"

4. Now John was dressed like the old-time prophets with a wrap-around camel skin held together with a leather belt. His diet was simple. He lived on locust fruit and wild honey.

5. Whenever he preached, the people in Jerusalem came to hear him and to be baptized, as did people from all over Judea and the surrounding territories.

6. They came and confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the river Jordan.

7. Also, many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came out to the wilderness to hear him preach and to watch him baptize. And when he noticed them in the crowd, he would say to them, "You men are like snakes in the grass. Who warned you to come here for safety? Is your conscience bothering you? Is that why you've come all this way to hear me?"

8. Sometimes he would preach even more strongly to them and say, "You're playing politics with our religion and with the Roman governor! If you're here to repent, then you need to turn your life around and stop playing games! That's what repentance is all about!"

9. And don't say to me, 'We're Abraham's descendants, so nothing can happen to us!' That means absolutely nothing so far as your salvation is concerned because God can create all the Abrahamic descendants He wants to out of these desert rocks!

10. This is the time when every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and used for firewood! In fact God is already applying His axe!

11. What I'm telling you is that I merely baptize people with water, but soon One will come who has all power. And I'm not even worthy to carry His shoes! He is the One who will baptize people in the power of the Holy Spirit and with spiritual fire!

12. To say it another way, He will have a large fan in His hand, and with it He will separate the husks from the wheat, store the wheat in His barn, and then destroy the husks with fire."

13. It was about this time that Jesus came down from Galilee to hear John preach and, as did others, asked John to baptize Him.

14. But when John sensed the purity of this Man, he knew this was the Messiah, so he refused to baptize Jesus and said, "You need to baptize me, and not I you!"

15. Then Jesus said, "Baptize me as you baptized all the others. You won't be doing anything wrong. You'll be doing what's right." Then John agreed and baptized Him.

16. As soon as Jesus was baptized He came up out of the water and knelt on the riverbank to offer a prayer of thanksgiving. He looked up, and heaven itself seemed to open. Then what looked like a white dove came down out of the sky and hovered over His head.

17. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am pleased."

CHAPTER 4

1. **Immediately** after His baptism, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the Judean wilderness to pray and to prepare Himself for His ministry. But the devil would not leave Him alone.

2. While in the wilderness, Jesus fasted for forty days. When His fast was over, He was famished.

3. That is when the devil decided to confront Him. In his first challenge, Satan disguised himself as an angel from heaven surrounded with light and told Jesus that, now that the fast was over, He had per-

mission to use His creative power to turn one of the desert stones into bread. If He were the Son of God, that should be no problem.

4. But, as famished as Jesus was, He recognized who was tempting Him to doubt His own divinity and to use His creative power to save Himself. So He answered and said, "The Scripture teaches that man is not to use any of his powers for himself, but he should use them to help others. I will not use my divinity to ease my lot in life."

5. But the devil didn't give up. Next he picked up Jesus bodily and carried Him to Jerusalem and stood Him on the highest point of the temple wall overlooking the valley below.

6. Then he dared Jesus to jump, to prove His faith in God and His adherence to Scripture. He even flattered Jesus for relying so firmly on God's word and quoted the Scripture which says, "God will instruct His angels to watch over you, and they will take care of you, so that, when you fall, they will catch you."

7. But Jesus knew that the devil had misquoted Scripture by leaving part of it out. Also He knew that nowhere do the Scriptures teach that God's people should foolishly put their lives in danger and then ask God to prove that He loves them by protecting them. So He answered the devil by quoting another Scripture which says, "You shall never doubt God's love and His power to protect you by publicly challenging Him to demonstrate His care for you."

8. But the devil still did not give up. Next he carried Him bodily to the top of a mountain and gave Him a panoramic view of the many available luxuries in the world and all the comforts that go with power and wealth.

9. Then he turned to Jesus and said, "I'll give you all this, plus the peoples of this world, if you acknowledge this as my gift to you."

10. Instantly Jesus responded to this offer of a life of ease and said, "Get out of the way, Satan, because the Scripture says, 'Man shall recognize God alone as the Owner of this planet and accept Him as

the Ruler.'"

11. Then the devil carried Jesus back to the desert and left Him there. By this time Jesus' strength was totally gone. All vital signs of life were fading, and it looked as if He would soon die. But an angel from heaven came to revive Him and to assure Him of His Father's approval and love.

12. **Meanwhile**, Herod Antipas, the other son of Herod the Great, who ruled to the north in Galilee, visited Jerusalem. While he was there, he had John the Baptist arrested and put into prison because John had publicly rebuked his adulterous marriage. When Jesus heard about it, He left Judea and headed north to Galilee instead of returning to Jerusalem where John had been preaching.

13. One of the first stops Jesus made was in His hometown of Nazareth. From there He went over to Capernaum near the Sea of Galilee and decided to make that place His home.

14. This also was according to prophecy when Isaiah said,

15. "The country by the sea beyond Jordan, which the Gentiles call Galilee, will be blessed.

16. The people who live in darkness will see great light, and, for those who have no hope, the light will shine."

17. From that time on, Jesus began to preach a message similar to what John had been preaching, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

18. Then walking by the sea early one morning, Jesus saw two brothers, one called Peter and the other Andrew. They were standing in a boat just a little off shore trying to catch some fish.

19. He called to them and said, "Come! Follow me! I'll teach you how to catch men!"

20. They listened and without hesitation came to shore, left their fishing gear, and followed Him.

21. Continuing on, Jesus saw two more brothers. One was called James and the other John. They were sitting in their boat with their father, Zebedee, mending nets. Jesus gave them the same invitation.

22. They left their father in the boat with the fishing gear and followed Him.

23. From here Jesus went on foot throughout the country of Galilee spreading the good news of the presence of God's kingdom by teaching in the synagogues, preaching in the open air, and healing people from all kinds of sicknesses.

24. Overnight He became known almost everywhere, and from as far away as Syria people with all kinds of diseases came to be healed, including those suffering from devil possession, epilepsy, and paralysis. He healed them all.

25. Large crowds followed Him wherever He went. Not only did people from Galilee follow Him, but also people from Decapolis, Jerusalem, the southernmost parts of Judea, and even from the other side of Jordan.

CHAPTER 5

1. **One** day when Jesus saw the crowds following Him, He made His way out of town to a hillside where He sat down surrounded by His disciples.

2. Then He shared with them and with His people the values of His kingdom. He said,

3. "Happiness comes from having the right attitude. If you feel your need of God and trust Him, you have the kingdom of God within you.

4. Happiness comes from feeling badly when you sin. Confess your sins and you will be forgiven and peace will spring up in your soul.

5. Happiness comes from being willing to listen and to obey. When you have an attitude which acknowledges God as the source of your life and of your abilities, you will always feel blest. One day, people like this will fill the whole earth.

6. Happiness comes from loving to do what is right and then actually doing it. Those who do this will have an inner satisfaction that nothing else can give.

7. Happiness comes from being kind, considerate, and forgiving. These are the daily things people will remember and they will return the same to you.

8. Happiness comes to those who have pure thoughts and motives for everything they do. Such people will one day have the privilege of seeing God face to face.

9. Happiness comes from being a peaceful people for such are God's children.

10. Happiness even comes from being persecuted for doing what's right. Just remember that no matter what happens, your place in heaven is already secured.

11. Strangely enough, you'll find yourself blest even when people slander you, hurt you, and lie about you because you accept me.

12. And when this happens, you can be glad because it shows that your name is written in heaven and that your reward will be waiting for you there. Remember, the prophets were treated no differently.

13. Now if you let go of these values, you'll be like tasteless salt. What good is salt that's tasteless? The only thing to do with it is to throw it into the garbage or out onto the road for people to walk on. But if you hold on to these values, you'll be the salt of the world.

14. With these values you'll be like a little city that is visible to everyone who passes by because it's built on a hill where they can see it.

15. Now you know that people don't light a candle to hide it, but they put it in a candle holder to give everyone in the house the benefit of the light.

16. This is what you should do with your life. Live in such a way that others will see the moral values you have and then praise God that they have witnessed them.

17. Now don't think that I'm doing away with Moses or with what the prophets taught. The things I'm telling you are actually the heart of their teachings.

18. I want to tell you that these values never change and there is no chance that they will change, anymore than you can expect heaven and earth to disappear, because what I'm telling you is the very heart of God's law.

19. And whoever lives contrary to these values and teaches people otherwise does not have the approval of heaven to do so, no matter what he says. The men and women who teach these values and practice them, they are the ones heaven approves.

20. I'm telling you with absolute certainty that you can not do everything scribes and Pharisees tell you and live the way they do and expect to get to heaven. Your life has to be guided by higher values than theirs. Now that you know the real values of heaven, you need to live by them, and unless you do, you cannot expect to have part in God's kingdom.

21. Let me help you by making it clear, so that you can understand what I'm saying. You've heard the scribes and Pharisees tell you not to kill, and that if you do, you'll be held liable by the courts for committing murder. They're right.

22. But I'm telling you that even if you don't kill, but you deeply despise someone, you'll be held liable by the heavenly court the same as if you committed murder. To go a step further, if you treat someone with contempt or if you ignore someone because you think you're better than they are, you'll never be entrusted with eternal life.

23. That's why you should make things right with others before you go to worship God. Now if while you're worshiping, you remember that you have something to make right,

24. it's better for you to leave, to go and make things right, and to come back later than to stay there and worship God with such hatred in your heart.

25. And let me tell you something else. If you are faced with a lawsuit, try to settle it out of court, otherwise you may end up in front of a judge who thinks you should go to jail for what you have done and he may send you to prison.

26. And you might have to stay there until they get the last penny out of you and your family.

27. Now you have also been taught not to commit adultery. That's right.

28. But I'm telling you that if you so much as look at a woman and lust after her, you're already having sex with her in your heart.

29. So, if there is anything that keeps leading you into sin, you need to get rid of it, even if it's as valuable to you as one of your eyes. It's better to go without an eye than to go on sinning and lose eternity.

30. Even if you had to lose one of your arms, it would be better to lose an arm here than lose out on heaven later.

31. **Now** the scribes and the Pharisees have told you that anyone who divorces his wife needs to make it legal by giving her a copy of the divorce paper, and that's right.

32. But I'm telling you that anyone who divorces his wife on some triviality, even though he does it legally, is putting her into a situation where she might find she has to support herself by prostitution, so her husband has forced her into adultery. If he now remarries, he is also living in adultery. Divorce must be based on marital infidelity only, not on trivialities.

33. Again you've been taught that you shouldn't take an oath unless you're making a promise to God. And those who teach that are right.

34. But I'm telling you, don't keep taking oaths to confirm what you just said, whether that oath is understood to be a promise to God or not.

35. Don't swear by anything that's in the heavens, on earth, or in Jerusalem, because everything belongs to God anyway.

36. And never be so irrational as to take an oath to do or die, because you have no control over your life and don't know what might happen to you.

37. So just communicate with people honestly by letting your yes be yes and your no be no. Taking an oath to confirm what you say is one of the devil's ways to make life miserable and to create suspicion between people.

38. You've been taught that it's right to fight for your rights in the courts until you get an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

39. But I'm telling you that even though the judge must give back what's right, you don't have to be angry about it. If someone slaps you on one side of your face, don't retaliate; let him slap you on the other side too. That way the problem will be with him, not with you.

40. And if anyone takes you to court and sues you for a certain amount, don't fight over every last penny. Let him have

a little more than you think he should have.

41. Furthermore, if a Roman soldier asks you to carry his pack for the mile allowed under the law of occupation, do more than the law says and carry it two miles for him. It's that kind of attitude that gives freedom to your spirit.

42. So be willing to do a favor for people when they ask you for one. If anyone wants to borrow anything from you, lend it to him.

43. Now you have been taught that you should love your neighbor, but that it's all right to hate your enemy.

44. But what I'm telling you is to carry out acts of love for your enemy too. Yes, ask for a blessing on them when they curse you, do something good for those who hate you, and keep on praying for those who use you and make things hard for you.

45. These are the kinds of actions that make you the children of God, not doing things the way the scribes and Pharisees tell you. Look at what your heavenly Father does! He makes the sun to shine on everyone, the good and the bad alike. Also, He waters the crops for those who do right and for those who don't.

46. Now if you do kind deeds only for those you care about or who care about you, what makes you different from anyone else? Even those who don't believe in God do that.

47. And if you greet cheerfully only those who cheerfully greet you, what have you done differently from other people?

48. You need to be different and do what your heavenly Father does. He is gracious and kind to everyone, and you should do the same.

CHAPTER 6

1. **On** the other hand, however, don't parade your goodness in front of others; that's of no value as far as heaven is concerned.

2. What I mean is, don't do things in such a way so as to blow your own trumpet, to let people know that you're going to church, or to let the church members see your big offering. That sort of thing is obviously being hypocritical because, al-

though an offering to God is a good thing, the fanfare that you put with it is to get people's attention. In this way you've already received your reward because the people gave you the attention you wanted, which was the reason you did it in the first place.

3. When you bring your offering to church, give it quietly; don't follow the practice of the scribes and Pharisees.

4. Remember that your heavenly Father knows what you give. That's all that matters. He will make a public statement about your faithfulness when the time comes.

5. When you pray, don't pray as the scribes and Pharisees do. They love to pray out loud in public places, whether it's in church or in the marketplace. If their purpose is to get people's attention, then they have their reward.

6. But when you pray, do it without display because your heavenly Father will hear your prayers even if you pray at home in your closet. You will soon discover what a blessing your prayers have been.

7. Also, when you pray, don't keep repeating the same things. Those who don't know the kind of God that God is pray that way.

8. But you don't have to pray that way because your heavenly Father listens to you the instant you begin to pray and even knows your needs before you start.

9. When you pray, pray something like this: Our Father in heaven, your name deserves to be honored because of who you are.

10. The success of your kingdom is the only thing that really matters. The values you have chosen for us already give us a foretaste of heaven.

11. So please take care of us each day.

12. And help us to forgive others as readily as you forgive us.

13. Do not leave us alone when our loyalty to you is tested, but help us to hold on to the principles of your kingdom and overcome whatever temptations the evil one brings against us. Heavenly Father, we are glad that the kingdom and the authority are in Your hands. And your cause is our cause, for ever and ever, Amen.

14. Now, when you pray this way, you have to remember that the answer to your prayer is conditional, based on your attitude toward others.

15. In fact, so long as you have an unforgiving attitude, it would not be right for your heavenly Father to forgive you.

16. Now, with regard to fasting, don't do everything the scribes and Pharisees do. When they fast, they want everyone to know it. They even distort their faces to show their supposed earnestness and concern. If their only goal is to impress people, then they've achieved it.

17. When you're fasting, dress and act as you always do.

18. People don't need to know that you're fasting. Your heavenly Father knows and that's what really matters. He will bless your sincerity.

19. **And** don't struggle to accumulate a lot of money because its value is always changing. You'll find yourself spending all of your time worrying about it and trying to protect it.

20. Focus instead on valuables that last, on those you can store up in heaven, where angels can rejoice with you over what you're accumulating.

21. Remember, whatever project you invest your money in will have your constant attention.

22. Now the relationship that exists between your money and your heart is the same relationship that exists between what you see and what you feel. When your eye really focuses on something, your whole body responds.

23. So if you focus only on money, your whole body will respond to it. Soon you'll become a financial machine, and your spiritual life will be ruined.

24. You can't have two things uppermost in your mind at the same time any more than you can be totally loyal to two masters at the same time. Eventually you'll have to choose between the two. One of your masters will have to come second. It's the same in regard to your relationship with God and the things of this world. You can't serve both equally well. You can't make two value statements at the same time. People know whether you're

serving God or money.

25. So don't be weighed down with concern for the things of this world. The thoughts that are uppermost in the minds of worldly people are: How do we look? Where do we go to eat next? But there is more to life than just eating and dressing well.

26. Look at the birds; they don't worry about sowing or harvesting, nor are they concerned about their future meals. Why? Because your heavenly Father takes care of them. And aren't you worth much more to Him than a bird?

27. Now which one of you can, by concentrating, make yourself grow? No one can.

28. So worrying about whether or not you'll have enough to eat in the future can't change a thing. So why worry? Also look at the lilies and notice that they don't worry about how they look or whether they can afford the latest fashions.

29. Yet, they are more beautifully dressed in their simplicity than Solomon was in all his splendor.

30. Now if God takes care of the birds and colors the flowers so beautifully, which bloom for a very short time and then are gone, how much more interested He is in you! Yet you have such little confidence in Him.

31. Don't even start worrying about food and clothing.

32. These are the priorities the world has. But remember that your heavenly Father knows that you need to earn money for food and clothes.

33. So make the kingdom of heaven first in your life and all of the necessities of life will be yours.

34. And don't start worrying about tomorrow because tomorrow has its own worries. Just be concerned about today and live one day at a time.

CHAPTER 7

1. **Now** don't judge other people.

2. Remember that the same rules you use in judging others, God will use them to judge you. Also, whatever attitude you have while dealing with others will generally show up in the attitude they will have

toward you.

3. Why are you so picky with your brother when you probably have bigger faults than he has?

4. How do you expect to help him when you can't even see your own mistakes?

5. What you need to do is to take a good look at yourself first; then you'll be better able to discern what is wrong with others.

6. Don't treat holy symbols as if they mean nothing; they're full of meaning. And don't share the things I'm sharing with you, with just anyone you meet, because some people are not ready to listen and they'll only turn on you.

7. Ask your heavenly Father for wisdom and for what you need to help you be a better person; He'll give it to you. When you look for spiritual blessings, you'll find them; and when you knock on your heavenly Father's door, He'll make His whole storehouse available to you.

8. Anyone who asks will receive; anyone who looks will find; and to anyone who knocks the door will be opened.

9. Now just think. What parent would give his son a rock when he asks for a piece of bread?

10. Or, what loving, caring parent would give his child a dish of poison when he asks for food?

11. Parents don't do that when they love their children. And if human parents know how to be kind to their children, why do you think your heavenly Father would do differently and be unkind to you?

12. Treat people the way you would have them treat you. That's what the law and the prophets are all about.

13. And don't follow the crowd. That's not a safe thing to do.

14. Actually, there are comparatively few who are really interested in heaven.

15. Some spiritual leaders seem to be very interested in these things that I'm telling you about, but you can't always be sure which way they're leading you.

16. One way to tell is by their fruits. As you know, grapes or figs don't come from a thorn bush.

17. It's the same way with people who

have prickly dispositions. They are not the ones you want to depend on for spiritual advice.

18. A bad tree will always produce bad fruit, and a good tree will bear good fruit. No one expects a bad tree to produce good fruit.

19. Remember, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is eventually cut down and used for firewood.

20. So you'll be able to detect those who are genuine from those who are not by looking at the fruit they eventually produce.

21. You see, not everyone who respects me necessarily loves me. They may call me Lord, but they don't have the same priorities and values that I do.

22. Many will even do great things for me, like working miracles or casting out devils.

23. But, when the Day of Judgment comes, many of these will not be in God's kingdom.

24. The ones who respect me and really love me are the ones who do what I ask them to do. They are like the man who built his house on solid ground.

25. After the floods and the winds had battered his house, it was still standing.

26. But the ones who honor me and don't really love me are the ones who like to do everything their own way. They are like the man who built his house on sand.

27. When the wind and the rains had battered his house, it collapsed."

28. Now when Jesus had finished talking, the people sat there stunned because His teaching was so much different from that of the scribes and the Pharisees.

29. He had made things plain to them and had given them a sense of certainty and hope, not just a lot of rules to follow.

CHAPTER 8

1. **Afterward**, great crowds followed Jesus everywhere.

2. Even lepers came to pay their respects and worship Him. One such leper said, "Lord, if you will, I know you are able to cleanse me."

3. Jesus reached out and touched him and quietly said, "I will; be cleansed."

Instantly the man's leprosy was gone.

4. Then Jesus said to him, "Don't tell anyone what I did for you until you first see a priest, so that he can pronounce you clean and you can give your thank offering. This way we'll be following the rules. More than that, you'll be a witness to them of who I am, because they'll ask you how you were healed. Later you can go home and tell whomever you wish what happened."

5. Then Jesus made His way back to Capernaum. While He was in that town, a Roman officer came to Him in public and said,

6. "Lord, my servant is at home sick and in terrible pain. Please heal him!"

7. Jesus looked at him and said, "I will come to your house and heal him."

8. The Roman officer answered saying, "Lord, who am I that you should come to my house? All you have to do is to give the word, and my servant can be healed from here.

9. I know, because nature obeys you just as my soldiers obey me. I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

10. When Jesus heard these words, He was amazed at this Roman's confidence in Him. So He turned to those nearby and said, "This Roman has more confidence in me than my own people do.

11. This is living proof that people everywhere can be the spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and they will be with them in God's kingdom.

12. But those who think their biological connection with Abraham makes them members of God's kingdom will be extremely disappointed."

13. Then Jesus turned to the Roman officer and said, "Go home, and you'll find your servant healed." When the officer arrived home, he found that his servant had been healed that same hour.

14. After church one day, Jesus accompanied Peter to his house and found Peter's mother-in-law sick with an extremely high temperature.

15. Jesus went over to her bed and gently touched her. Immediately her temperature returned to normal; her sickness was gone. And she got up and helped her daughter take care of the guests.

16. As soon as it was sundown and the Sabbath restrictions were lifted, people came from everywhere wanting to be healed, many of whom were devil possessed. And Jesus cast out the demons simply by speaking to them and healed all the people who were sick.

17. This was a direct fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy which says, "He will take upon Himself our infirmities and He will carry our sicknesses."

18. Jesus had no quiet time as huge crowds followed him wherever he went. So He decided to leave the city of Capernaum and cross over to the other side of the lake for a rest.

19. Just before then a young teacher came to him and said, "Master, I'll follow you wherever you go."

20. Jesus said to him, "Even foxes have their own dens and birds have the privacy of their nests, but I have no place to call my own or to invite you. Many times I have to sleep in the open air. Are you sure you want to follow me?"

21. Then another person spoke up and said, "Lord, my father just died; please wait for me until after the funeral, then I'll come to join you."

22. Jesus said to him, "If you really want to follow me, you can't have a lot of stipulations. There are some things you will have to let other people do so that you can give all your energy to my mission. In your case you need to decide to join me now, not later."

23. Upon reaching the boats, Jesus boarded one of them with his disciples and began the trip across the lake.

24. When they were about halfway across, an unexpected storm came up, and within minutes the waves were pounding against the boat, filling it with water. Unaware of the excitement, Jesus, exhausted, had fallen sound asleep.

25. The storm was so violent, that finally His disciples shook Him awake and

said, "Lord, please do something to save us or we'll all be lost!"

26. Then Jesus sat up and said, "Why are you afraid? Why do you have so little confidence in God? Our heavenly Father is watching us and knows exactly what is happening. He'll protect us to make sure that our work for Him is not cut short." Then standing up, Jesus steadied Himself in the rocking boat and rebuked the wind and the waves. Suddenly everything became peaceful and still. The storm clouds lifted, and again the moon shed its light on the quiet lake.

27. The disciples, together with the people in the other boats who saw this, were speechless. Finally, they said to each other, "What kind of Man is this who speaks to the winds and the water and they obey Him!"

28. When they arrived at the other side of the lake in the area called Gadarenes, they got out of the boat. Two devil-possessed madmen living in nearby rock tombs came charging down the hill at Jesus screaming,

29. "Get out! Get out! We don't want you here! You are the Son of God! You've come here before the Time of Judgment to torture us!"

30. Now in the distance was a small herd of pigs.

31. The demons inside the men said, "If you have to cast us out, let us go into that herd of pigs."

32. Jesus said, "Go." So the demons left the two men and went into the pigs. Suddenly the pigs went wild, charged down the hill, and plunged into the lake.

33. Terrified, the people who had been herding the pigs ran back to town to tell the pig farmers what had happened, including the miraculous healing of the two madmen.

34. Soon it seemed as if the whole countryside was coming out to see what had happened. This was the purpose Jesus had in mind. The pig farmers were eager to see the man who had dared to do such a thing. However, after these Jewish farmers met Him, they insisted that He leave the area because He was a detriment to their business.

CHAPTER 9

1. So Jesus quietly got back into the boat and returned to Capernaum.

2. When He arrived, once again the people brought their sick to Him to be healed. One man was totally paralyzed. Jesus, noticing the people's faith in Him, said to the sick man, "Son, don't despair. You are forgiven of all your sins, including the ones that were troubling you the most."

3. When the scribes nearby heard Jesus, they thought to themselves, "That's blasphemy!"

4. Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to them, "Why are you always so judgmental?"

5. Which is easier, to forgive sins or to heal someone who is totally paralyzed? Both require divine power.

6. To show you that I didn't blaspheme or falsely assume the power of God,"--He then turned to the paralyzed man and said, "Stand up, take your cot, and go home."

7. The paralyzed man got up, took his cot, and went home!

8. The people saw this and were amazed. They praised God for giving such power to this man called Jesus.

9. Later that day as Jesus was making His way through the city, He passed an income tax booth and saw a man named Matthew collecting taxes from his people for the Romans. He looked at him and said, "Come, follow me." To everyone's surprise Matthew stood up, turned the work over to the Roman guards, and followed Jesus.

10. When Jesus accepted an invitation by Matthew to dinner, He found that Matthew had invited his relatives and friends, including tax collectors and other social outcasts. They all had come in order to see Jesus. Some even sat down next to Jesus and His disciples and ate with them.

11. When the Pharisees who attended the dinner saw this, they took some of the disciples aside and said, "Why does your master let such socially despicable people as publicans, who collect taxes for the Romans, and others who we know are living in open sin, sit and eat with Him?"

12. But Jesus overheard the conversation and interrupted by saying to the

Pharisees, "People who are well don't need a physician, only people who are sick. These people feel they need help. That's why they've come here.

13. What you need to do is to study the Scriptures to see what Hosea taught when he spoke for God and said, 'What I want is to see more compassion and mercy in the hearts of my people, not just to receive more and more animal sacrifices.' From this you can see that my mission is not to call righteous people to repentance nor to change their lives, but to help publicans and sinners change theirs."

14. Then some of John the Baptist's disciples who were also present asked Jesus, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast so often but your disciples don't?"

15. Jesus looked at them and asked, "Do wedding guests fast at a wedding reception when they're sitting next to the bridegroom? It won't be long before the wedding feast will be over because the bridegroom will be forcibly taken away; then the wedding guests will mourn and fast.

16. No one would think of sewing a new piece of cloth to a rotting pair of pants because, as soon as he sat down, the pants would give way from the strain put on them and the section that needed repairing would be bigger than before.

17. It's the same way with leather wine bottles. You don't put fresh grape juice into dried-out leather bottles because they're not flexible and the continued pressure on the inside will split them wide open. That's why you have to put fresh juice into flexible bottles."

18. **While** this conversation was taking place, a local church leader came to Jesus, respectfully bowed to Him, and said, "My daughter is near death. Come quickly and touch her, and I know she'll open her eyes again and be well."

19. Then Jesus got up, thanked his host, said goodbye to the other guests, and with His disciples, followed this man to his house.

20. While they were making their way through the crowds, a woman who had been menstruating continuously for the last twelve years managed to squeeze through the crowd, come up behind Jesus, and,

reaching out, touched the edge of His robe.

21. She had convinced herself that if she could only reach out and touch His robe, she would be healed.

22. Instantly Jesus stopped. He turned to her and said, "Don't be afraid. You didn't do anything wrong by touching me. Your faith has been rewarded. You are now healed." And the woman knew that from the instant she touched His robe, she had been healed.

23. Then a messenger pressed through the crowd and told the man that his daughter had died; so Jesus need not come. Jesus overheard it, but continued on His way. Upon arriving at the local church leader's house, they found it full of professional mourners playing funeral songs, weeping relatives, and neighbors who had come to share the family's grief.

24. When Jesus heard all this commotion, it troubled Him. He said to the people, "Please make room for me to see the girl. She's not really dead; she's only resting." They all quietly laughed to themselves at what He said.

25. But the family asked the people to step outside. Then Jesus went inside to the bedroom where the little girl was and took her hand. And she opened her eyes and sat up.

26. The news of this spread like fire throughout the whole area.

27. As Jesus left the house, two blind men followed saying, "Son of David, please have mercy on us!"

28. When Jesus got to where He was going, the two blind men followed Him into the house. Jesus took a seat and asked them, "Do you really believe that I can do what you want me to do?" They said, "Yes, we do!"

29. Then Jesus reached out and touched their eyes and said, "As you believe, so be it."

30. Instantly they could see! Jesus told them not to make their healing public because it could shorten His ministry in that place.

31. But after the two men left the house, they broadcast their healing everywhere. Soon the whole neighborhood heard about it.

32. Jesus decided to move on because He was attracting too much attention, but the people followed Him and continued to ask Him to heal them. One such man was devil possessed and mute.

33. After Jesus cast out the devils, the man could talk again. The people were amazed and said, "Never did things like this happen in Israel before!"

34. The Pharisees in the crowd were quick to dampen their enthusiasm by telling the people, "His power over the demons is not from God, but from other demons. It's the prince of demons who is helping Him to do this. That's why He can do what He's doing!"

35. Jesus paid little attention to what the Pharisees said, but continued on His way, stopping at all the cities and villages in the area, teaching in the local synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and disease the people had. In some places there was not a sick person left in the whole town.

36. Whenever He saw a group of people, His heart was moved with compassion because they seemed so fragile, weak, and unsure about where they were going, as sheep without a shepherd.

37. At times like these, Jesus would turn to His disciples and say, "The harvest is great, but the laborers are so few.

38. Pray that God will send more laborers to help us with what we're doing."

CHAPTER 10

1. **Now** Jesus not only healed the sick and cast out demons, but also shared His power with His disciples. All twelve of them cast out demons and healed the sick.

2. The names of the twelve disciples were Peter, Andrew (who was Peter's brother), James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother.

3. Then there was Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew who used to be a tax collector for the Romans, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus,

4. Simon, the patriot, and Judas Iscariot who eventually sold Jesus for money.

5. These were the twelve Jesus sent out to preach and to heal. Before He sent

them out from Galilee, He said to them, "I don't want you to go and preach to the Gentiles who live to the north, or even to the Samaritans who live just south of here.

6. I want you to begin your preaching and healing in Israel.

7. I want you to tell them that the kingdom of God is here!

8. Then give them a glimpse of that kingdom by healing their sick, cleansing their lepers, raising their dead, and casting out demons. Do this graciously and freely as though you're giving gifts to people, because this power is my gift to you.

9. Don't worry about money or how you will live.

10. Don't take along extra clothes and shoes, because you're doing God's work and the people you heal will help you.

11. When you come into a city or a village and the people are receptive, stay there until you complete your mission. Don't rush off to the next place.

12. Be a grateful and gracious guest wherever you stay.

13. If the family who puts you up for the night is genuinely kind, then thank them and bless them. But if they try to exploit your healing powers, thank them as you leave but don't bless them because you'll be sanctioning their misbehavior.

14. If you come into a town that's hostile or not interested in what you have to say, go on to the next one.

15. I'm telling you that Sodom and Gomorrah's record will look better in the judgment than the record of the towns that reject what you're offering them.

16. Your work won't be easy for you, because you're like sheep walking in the midst of wolves. You must be very wise in what you do so that you won't anger the people.

17. They will not hesitate to have you arrested and take you to court or even physically abuse you.

18. You might even be taken before the Roman governor or one of King Herod's sons. Remember it's for my sake and the people's sake that you're spreading the good news.

19. If persecution comes to you, don't try to plan what you're going to say to the

judge or to the governor. God will tell you what to say and help you to say it.

20. Then you'll know that God is with you and that you're not the one who is speaking but that the Holy Spirit is speaking through you.

21. Don't be surprised if you see among your converts a believer being taken to court and being testified against by his own brother, or a father willing to have his own children executed because they believe what you say, or even children turning against their believing parents and having them arrested and maybe even having them put to death.

22. Don't be surprised if you're hated for my sake, but do your work faithfully, and you'll have a place with me in my kingdom.

23. When they persecute you in one place, go to another place to work. Remember that you will not have time to preach in every town before I have to do my final work.

24. You should know that a disciple can't expect to be treated better than his lord, nor a servant better than his master.

25. Genuine disciples are like loyal servants. They feel that it's a privilege to be identified with their lord. So if people call the Lord a devil, what would you expect the people to call you?

26. Don't be afraid. People can do nothing to you that will not come up in the Judgment for public view, in fact for the whole universe to see.

27. Whatever I tell you in some of our evening get-togethers, you may feel free to preach in broad daylight. What I tell you privately is also for public consumption. There's nothing secret about my mission.

28. Don't be afraid you might be killed. They can kill your body but not your spirit or your loyalty to me. Now, if there is something to be concerned about, it's that you don't lose your confidence in God.

29. Remember that God never loses sight of you. Look at the sparrows and see how little they're valued, and yet not one of them dies without God noticing it.

30. In fact, God even knows the number of hairs you have on your head.

31. So don't be afraid; you're worth

more than a whole sky full of sparrows.

32. Anyone who stands up for me, I'll stand up for him--in front of the whole universe.

33. As for a disciple who is ashamed of me, I would never be able to justify him before the universe even if I tried.

34. Sometimes the gospel is like a two-edged sword: it brings the good news of salvation on the one hand, but accepting it can also bring persecution.

35. It can even slice families apart such as fathers from their sons, or mothers from their daughters, and in-laws from their in-laws.

36. In fact, a disciple's enemies could come from his own family.

37. If you think more highly of your parents or of your family than of me, then I can't trust you to be a loyal disciple.

38. No matter how painful it may be, you must be willing to carry your cross just as I'm willing to carry mine.

39. If your only concern is to get the most out of life, you'll never be happy because happiness comes from giving yourself to others.

40. Anyone who welcomes you is really welcoming me, and anyone who loves me will love you too.

41. If a person receives you as he would an inspired prophet, he'll be rewarded accordingly. If he receives you as if you're just a good man, he'll even be rewarded for that.

42. In fact, no one can give a drink of water or be kind to any of my disciples, young or old, without recognition in heaven."

CHAPTER 11

1. **After** Jesus had encouraged His disciples, He, too, went out to preach and to heal.

2. Now John the Baptist, even though he had been put into prison, heard about the things that Jesus was doing. So he sent two of his followers to find out first-hand if what he had heard was true.

3. And when they found Jesus, they asked Him, "Are you the One who should come to deliver Israel, or should we look for Someone else?"

4. Jesus said to them, "Stay here for awhile and watch what I'm doing and then go tell John what you saw.

5. If you stay here, you will see the blind receiving their sight, the lame walking, lepers being healed, and the deaf having their hearing restored. In fact, a dead girl has already been raised and others will be raised also. And all the while the good news is being preached even to the most neglected.

6. The man who recognizes the Messiah's work in all of this will be glad for what is happening."

7. When the disciples of John saw these things for themselves, they went back and gave John a first-hand report of what Jesus was doing. After they had gone, Jesus turned to the crowd to ask their opinion of John. "When you went out into the desolate area around Jordan, what did you expect to see? Did you expect to see a man who bends with every political and religious wind that blows? Of course not.

8. Then tell me, why did you go all that distance into the desert to hear John preach? Did you expect to see a man dressed in the latest fashion? Of course you didn't, because you know that those kinds of men like to live in the cities where all the comforts are. They don't like to live in the wilderness.

9. Then why did you go out to hear John? You went out because you wanted to see and hear a prophet. I want to tell you that John is a prophet and much more than a prophet.

10. He's the one Malachi prophesied about when he spoke on behalf of God and said, 'Listen, I will send a messenger ahead of my Son who will prepare the hearts of the people for His coming.'

11. That's why John the Baptist is more than just a prophet. The purpose of his calling was to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. Those who see what I do and hear what I'm saying are even more privileged than John.

12. Beginning with John's ministry, the good news of the kingdom will start to bring about opposition, but the courageous will preach the good news anyway.

13. Everything written in the books of

Moses and in the prophets about the Messiah points to this time.

14. John the Baptist is the Elijah everyone expected to see before the Messiah came. If you've taken John's message to heart, you will have recognized him as being the prophesied Elijah.

15. So open your ears to hear; understand not only with your mind but also with your heart.

16. Now to what shall I compare the people of this generation? They are like two groups of children playing in the street. One group is playing the part of musicians, while the other group is supposed to respond to their music. But there's no response.

17. Finally the first group says, 'We play happy songs and you don't sing; then we play funeral songs and you don't cry!' They don't know what to do to get the second group to respond.

18. That's how it is with the people and with John and me. John lived a very strict life, and they said he was a fanatic; some even thought he was devil possessed.

19. When they saw me living normally, eating and drinking with all kinds of people, I was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. But the person who is wise will judge us by our mission."

20. Then Jesus expressed His disappointment in the people who lived in the cities where He recently performed some of His greatest miracles, because of their lack of response.

21. "I am disappointed in you, Bethsaida and Chorazin, because if I had performed these same miracles in the streets of the non-Jewish cities of Tyre and Sidon, they would have responded by immediately changing their ways.

22. That's why the Judgment will be easier on them than on you.

23. Capernaum, you're so full of pride, you think everything is beneath your dignity. But you will be brought to your knees. If the miracles I did in your streets were done in Sodom, the people would have responded and their city would have been spared.

24. That's one of the reasons they will

receive more consideration in the Judgment than you will."

25. Then Jesus looked up and spoke to His heavenly Father saying, "I thank you, Father, that my works are understood by some of the people even though they have only a simple faith. Most of the educated ones seem to be filled with pride and think that they need nothing.

26. But I know that even this meager response is pleasing to You."

27. Then Jesus turned to the people again and said, "You see the Father has put me in charge of everything down here because He knows me as no one else does and knows He can trust me. I know the kind of person the Father is and this is the good news I've been trying to share with you.

28. Come, put your trust in me, all you that have to work so hard, and I will refresh your soul and give you rest.

29. Come and learn more about me and my dependence on my Father. His commandments are easy and light. If you follow my example, a peace and restfulness will come into your soul that will be beyond anything you believed possible.

30. My requirements are easy and light, not complicated and burdensome like the requirements of the Pharisees."

CHAPTER 12

1. **Some** time later Jesus and His disciples were passing through a wheat field on their way to the synagogue. Since they hadn't had breakfast, they picked some of the heads of wheat, rolled them in their hands, and were eating the kernels.

2. But when some Pharisees came by, also on their way to the synagogue, they stopped, turned to Jesus, and said, "Can't you see that your disciples are breaking the Sabbath? They're harvesting on God's holy day!"

3. Jesus directed them to the Scriptures and said, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his followers were hungry?

4. They went into the Holy Place and ate the Sanctuary bread which only the priests are supposed to eat. But the priests knew that even holy things can at times be

used to serve people's needs without incurring guilt.

5. And if you're concerned about Sabbath work, what about the priests who have to work in the temple on the Sabbath? They work harder on that day taking care of the services in the Temple than on any other day of the week.

6. You may not realize it, but you're talking to the One who wrote these rules and who made the Sabbath to be a day of rest. So I know how it should be kept.

7. But your problem is that you see everything through the eyes of the law as a lawyer does instead of seeing things through eyes of mercy as God does. If you would have seen what my disciples were doing through eyes of mercy, you would have noticed that they were not harvesting but simply trying to satisfy their hunger before going to the synagogue.

8. Remember, I am Lord of the Sabbath day."

9. Jesus and His disciples left the Pharisees standing in the field of wheat and went on ahead to the local synagogue.

10. A man was there who had a shriveled arm. When the Pharisees came in, they were still upset about the conversation in the wheat field. So they pointed to the man with the shriveled arm and said to Jesus, so everyone could hear, "If people's physical comfort is reason enough to break the Sabbath and you are Lord of the Sabbath as you said, then why shouldn't you heal this man's hand on the Sabbath and make him comfortable too?" Now the reason the Pharisees said this was to turn the people against Jesus for healing on the Sabbath.

11. Jesus turned to the people and said, "Is there anyone here who doesn't own a sheep or two? Now what do you do when on the Sabbath one of your sheep falls into a ditch? Don't you go and pull it out? And when you do, aren't you relieving the sheep of its discomfort?

12. Of how much more value is this man. That's why it's not wrong to relieve people of their extreme discomfort even on the Sabbath day."

13. Turning to the man with the shriveled arm, Jesus quietly said, "Stretch out

your arm.” The man obeyed, and in the attempt to stretch it out, his arm was healed.

14. When the Pharisees saw this, they left the synagogue but later that afternoon met together to decide how to have Jesus arrested and executed for practicing His healing arts on the Sabbath.

15. Jesus, knowing what they were up to, also left the synagogue. A huge crowd followed Him, and that same afternoon He healed every one of them.

16. Then Jesus told the people not to broadcast their miraculous healing because it might antagonize the Pharisees even more.

17. This, too, was a fulfilment of prophecy. And this is what Isaiah meant when he spoke for the Lord saying,

18. “Look at my Servant. The One I love is the very One I sent you. I am so pleased with Him because He’s doing what I would do. He will come and share the good news of my salvation with everyone.

19. He will not argue about it nor purposely make it an issue. He will not become emotional over it and act and shout like a clown in the streets.

20. He will not deal harshly with people, but will deal kindly and gently with them, especially with those whose hearts are bruised and with those who have even the smallest interest in what He is saying.

21. Consequently, people from everywhere will trust Him.”

22. As Jesus continued to heal the people, they brought to Him a person who was blind, mute, and devil possessed. And Jesus made him completely whole.

23. When the people saw this miracle, they were amazed and told each other, “This must be the Son of David whom we expected to come! He must be the One!”

24. But when the Pharisees heard what the people were saying, they tried to dampen their enthusiasm by accusing Jesus of using demonic power to work such miracles, even when He cast out other demons.

25. Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to them, “If a country or a kingdom is divided against itself, it can

never be victorious over an outside enemy. This same thing is true with a city, a town, or a family; if they are divided, they can never succeed.

26. Now if the devil is using his own power to cast out other devils, how can his kingdom be victorious?

27. And if the power to cast out devils comes from the devil, where did the power that the prophets used to cast out devils come from? If you could ask them, they would tell you, and we know what they would say.

28. Now, if I’m casting out devils by the same power the prophets used, then you’re seeing the kingdom of God at work.

29. How else is the kingdom of God supposed to work? He works just as anyone would who wants to go about his business unhindered. Even a thief knows what to do. He first ties up the owner of the house so that he can do what he came to do unhindered.

30. If you can’t support me in my work against the demons, you must really have it in for me.

31. Still, all sins that men commit can be forgiven even if they curse God. But when you turn against the Holy Spirit’s work by calling it demonic, how can you be convicted of your sins and receive forgiveness?

32. God is willing to forgive you even if you accuse me of working together with devils, but when you do so in front of all these people and undermine the power of the Holy Spirit, you are cutting yourselves off from the last source by which God can reach you.

33. So you need to make up your mind whether my work of casting out demons is from God or not. If it is from God, then it is good and the one doing it must be good too. If demon-possessed people cast out demons, then something must be wrong with this whole process of deliverance. You can’t have it both ways.

34. Besides, how can you stand there planning to have me killed and at the same time be objective in your evaluation of my work, whether it is of God or of the devil?

35. If a man’s heart is good, he’ll be able to evaluate whether my work is good

or not. If a man's heart is full of hatred, he can only come to a bad conclusion.

36. Every careless decision you make about someone else and spread around to others, you'll be held responsible for in the Judgment.

37. The influence of what you say and do will play a big part in the Judgment to determine whether you'll be exonerated or condemned."

38. The Pharisees said, "Give us an unquestionable miracle, then we'll believe that you're exercising the power of God and not the power of the devil."

39. Jesus said, "Some men are always asking for total verification before they believe anything. And they do this so they can continue to do what they're doing. You're asking for an unquestionable miracle? In the near future you'll see one because no greater miracle can be given than one like what happened to the prophet Jonah.

40. He was entombed in the whale's belly for parts of three days and nights and came out alive. So similarly, I will be entombed in the earth for parts of three days and nights and also come out alive.

41. In fact, some of the people of Ninevah to whom Jonah preached will be saved and in the Judgment will marvel at your blindness. They'll then remind you how they repented at the simple preaching of Jonah and that you had the privilege of listening to Someone much greater than Jonah, but you still didn't repent.

42. Also the Queen of Sheba, who traveled all that way just to hear Solomon's wisdom, will be saved. She too will wonder how you could be so blind to someone's actions which are so much greater than what she saw and heard at Solomon's court.

43. Now, you realize, of course, that when a demon is cast out of a man, he's very restless.

44. And he keeps his eyes on his old victim who looks tremendously inviting to him.

45. He then goes to his fellow demons and invites several others to join him. Together they go back and, as is always possible, are able to gain possession of that man again. And because he has not opened

his heart to the Holy Spirit, he is worse off than before. You, too, need to be careful that by tuning out the Holy Spirit you don't become more evil than you already are."

46. Then Jesus turned from the Pharisees and continued teaching the people. One day, while teaching a large group of people, His mother and his step-brothers came.

47. They couldn't get into the house where Jesus was because of the crowd, so they passed a message to Jesus to tell Him that they had come and wanted to talk to Him privately.

48. When His disciples brought Him the message, He turned to the people and said, "My relatives are outside and want to talk to me privately, but who are my real relatives?"

49. He waved His hand over the people and said, "These are my real relatives! They are my mothers and my brothers.

50. Because whoever is willing to do what my Father says is related to me and is my mother and my brother."

CHAPTER 13

1. Then Jesus made His way outside to see His mother and step-brothers who counseled Him to avoid these disagreeable controversies between Himself and the Pharisees. They thought He was being too bold by publicly claiming divine authority for Himself. So to find peace for the hurt in His heart, Jesus went down to the lake.

2. These crowds were so big, that in order to be comfortable, He had to get into a fishing boat and push off from shore.

3. It was from the boat that He taught the people. "Look," He said as He pointed to a man on a nearby hillside, "a sower sowing seed in his field.

4. As you know, a sower sows as close to the edge of his field as he can, and, as he does, some of the seeds fall on the nearby roadway, and the birds are right there to eat all they can.

5. Some seeds fall on rocky areas in the field where there is little or no soil, and these are the first seeds that come up because they don't have much soil to grow down into.

6. And after they're exposed to the hot sun for a few days, they shrivel up and die.

7. Still other seeds fall where some thistle seeds are, and the thistle seeds root and grow faster than the good seeds do, thus choking them out.

8. But most of the seeds fall on good ground, and the plants produce more seeds, some a hundred, others sixty, and still others thirty.

9. Now think carefully about what I've said. Then you'll understand what I'm trying to tell you."

10. Some time later the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him, "Why do you use such everyday illustrations in your teaching and then not explain what they mean?"

11. He said to them, "You don't need my help to understand what I'm trying to teach the people because you want to know what I'm saying. It's only those who don't want to know that can't understand.

12. The person who is guided by the Holy Spirit will receive all the insight he needs, but anyone who doesn't depend on the Holy Spirit to help him understand will soon lose the little insight he does have into what I'm saying.

13. The reason I use everyday illustrations is to give the Holy Spirit room to work on people's hearts and minds. Also, this way you can tell which ones really want to know and which ones do not.

14. Some people just don't really care to know. The prophet Isaiah predicted this would happen when he spoke for God and said, 'The people will listen, but they won't understand; with their own eyes they'll see what's happening, but they won't be convinced.'

15. The reason is that their hearts are not in the right place. They close their ears and shut their eyes and, although they hear what is being said, they won't understand what it's all about. Even though they'll see things happening before their very eyes, it won't mean a thing. And they won't come to me for spiritual healing because they don't really want to be converted.

16. But you're different. Your heart is in the right place, and as a result, you can see and hear and understand.

17. Also, you're more privileged than the prophets were. They desperately wanted to see what you're seeing and hear what you're hearing but didn't have the opportunity.

18. However, since you asked, let me explain to you the meaning of the illustration of the sower.

19. The field that was being sowed represents the whole world. The seed is the good news about salvation. I am the sower. The people who only half listen to what I'm saying can be compared to the roadway. They don't really welcome the good news and whatever impression it does make on them, Satan is right there to take that impression away, so there are no lasting results.

20. The people who hear the good news and are thrilled by it,

21. but live it only half-heartedly, are like the rocky areas in the field which have little or no soil. When everything goes well in their lives, they're fine; but as soon as the life they should be living becomes a little difficult, they forget the whole thing.

22. Then there are people who hear the good news, receive it joyously, and are even willing to suffer for it; yet they get so busy with making a living and getting ahead that their priorities get turned around. Their experience is choked, and they never bear any fruit. They are like the seed trying to grow underneath the thorns.

23. Finally, there are those who listen attentively and receive the good news in their hearts and fully commit themselves to it. They live their lives in such a way so that the good news always has top priority, and they bear fruit accordingly. Some of these people will win a hundred to the gospel, others sixty, and still others thirty. They are represented by the seed sown in the good part of the field."

24. Then Jesus turned back to the people on the shore and said, "The kingdom of God is like a man who sowed his whole field with good seed.

25. But during the night his enemy came, sowed weeds over the field, and then went back home.

26. When the good seed sprouted, the weeds came up too.

27. And when the field workers realized what had happened, they came to the owner and said, 'We know that you gave us good seed to sow in your field, but now the field is full of weeds! Where did they come from?'

28. The good man said, 'My enemy did this.' Then the workers said, 'We'll just go out and pull the weeds before they get too big!'

29. But the farmer stopped them saying, 'If I let you pull up the weeds now, no matter how small they are, you'll pull up some of the wheat too.'

30. It's already too late for that. We need to let them grow together until harvest time. Then we'll all go out, cut the wheat and the weeds together, and separate them. In this way we won't hurt the grain, and we can store it safely in the barn. The weeds we'll put aside and later burn.'"

31. Jesus illustrated the kingdom of God still another way. He said to His disciples, "The beginning of God's kingdom can be compared to a tiny mustard seed which a man took and planted in the garden behind his house.

32. As you know, the mustard seed is a very tiny seed, but when the plant had grown to its full height, it was bigger than anything he had in his garden. Even the birds found it attractive and came and built their nests in it.

33. Also, the growth of God's kingdom can be compared to the quiet action of yeast that women put in their bread dough. Without notice, the yeast begins to permeate the dough, and the dough begins to rise."

34. These are just some of the insights Jesus shared with His disciples and with the people as He taught them.

35. This too was a fulfilment of prophecy when the Psalmist spoke for the Messiah saying, "I will open my mouth and teach my people things hidden for centuries by the use of everyday illustrations."

36. Then Jesus had his disciples return the little fishing boat to shore. When He got out, someone invited Him to dinner, and He accepted. While they were waiting for dinner, His disciples said, "Tell us

the meaning of the story about the man who had weeds sown in his field."

37. Jesus explained the story by saying, "The man who sowed good seed in His field is the Son of God.

38. The field is the whole world and the good seed are the good people in the world. The weeds are the bad people in the world.

39. The enemy that sowed weeds is the devil. Now the harvest is the end of this world's probation, and the sorters are the angels.

40. Just as the weeds are sorted out from the wheat during harvest time and later burned, so it will be at the end of the world.

41. The Son of God will send His angels to sort out the bad people from the good ones.

42. The wicked will suffer bitter remorse when they later realize that they will be no more.

43. But the good people will be exceedingly happy as they live forever in their Father's house. Now those who hear these parables should listen to their meaning and take them to heart.

44. Now the kingdom of God can also be compared to a hidden treasure that's buried in a field. When a man finds it, he quickly covers it up, goes home, and sells everything he has to buy that field.

45. You can also compare the kingdom of God to the most valuable pearl you can find and to the experience of the merchant who finds it and knows its worth.

46. When he finds it, he sells everything he has to buy this one precious pearl. That's how much God loves you and how much you should love Him.

47. The kingdom of God is also like a fishing net that is thrown out into the water. When it is pulled in, it brings in good and bad fish alike.

48. The fishermen save the good fish, and the bad ones they throw away.

49. That's the way it'll be for people at the end of the world. The angels will do the sorting, separating the bad from the good.

50. The bad people will experience the excruciating pain of eternal finality just before their lives are extinguished forever."

51. Then Jesus asked His disciples, "Do

you understand what I'm saying about the kingdom?" And they said, "We do."

52. Jesus responded by saying, "Every disciple who understands what God's kingdom is all about is like a wise gentleman who knows how to conduct his business well. He sells antiques as items of the latest design. He knows how to offer people new understanding without depreciating old truths."

53. Soon dinner was served. When Jesus and His disciples had eaten, He thanked His host, said goodbye, and left for Nazareth, His hometown.

54. There He taught in the local synagogue and healed scores of people. The townsfolk were so amazed that they asked each other, "Where did Joseph's boy get all this wisdom and all this power to heal the sick?"

55. Are we mistaken? Isn't this the stepson of Joseph the carpenter, and isn't His mother called Mary? And aren't His stepbrothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Jude, the four sons of Joseph by a former marriage? They're not like that.

56. And his step-sisters aren't anything special to speak of either. So where did this boy get all His intelligence?" Unfortunately they thought Jesus felt superior to them and had now come back to teach them.

57. This made them jealous, so that they turned against Jesus. He sensed their attitude, and one day He said to them, "A prophet is always treated with respect everywhere he goes except in his own hometown."

58. So He had to stop His ministry in Nazareth because the people there didn't trust Him.

CHAPTER 14

1. **About** this same time the son of Herod the Great, who ruled in Galilee, heard about Jesus.

2. And, talking to his servants one day, he said to them, "This man Jesus must be John the Baptist risen from the dead! There's no other way to explain how He can do all these miracles."

3. Now this was the same Herod who had put John the Baptist in prison because

his wife, Herodias, whom he had taken from his half-brother Philip, asked him to do so.

4. And the reason for this was her resentment toward John because he had publicly stated that their relationship was adulterous.

5. Herod would have beheaded John right away for saying this, but he was afraid that there would be a public uproar because the people believed John to be a real prophet. So Herod just kept him in prison.

6. Not long after John's arrest, Herod celebrated his birthday. During the evening while he was entertaining his guests, he decided to ask his step-daughter to come in and dance for his guests. She did so, and electrified everyone with her performance.

7. Herod was so pleased that he offered to give her anything she asked for, even to being co-ruler with him, and confirmed his promise in front of his guests with an oath.

8. Thrilled with her successful performance and her promised co-regency, she went to tell her mother and asked her what to request. Her mother, thinking that nothing was more important than to preserve the family pride, told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. The daughter agreed and quickly returned to the banquet hall. As soon as she came in, Herod quieted the guests and let her state her request; she asked that the head of John the Baptist be brought to her on a serving tray.

9. Herod was stunned! But because of the oath he had taken, and because he did not want to lose face among his guests by acting as if he didn't know what he was doing, he immediately gave the order to have John beheaded.

10. The palace guard went down to John's cell, woke him up, and beheaded him.

11. Then the attendants brought his head in on a serving tray and gave it to the girl. She in turn presented it to her mother.

12. The next morning the news broke and John's disciples were among the first ones to hear it. They went to the prison and asked the guards if they could have

the body in order to give it a decent burial. The guards agreed. Then John's disciples buried him and went to tell Jesus.

13. Jesus was so saddened by the news that He got into a small boat and asked His disciples to take Him across the lake, so that He might be alone for awhile. But the people followed Him by crossing the lake in other boats or by going around the lake on foot.

14. When Jesus saw the people coming, He was moved with compassion and pity, and He began healing their sick and afflicted.

15. Late in the afternoon His disciples interrupted Jesus by saying, "We're out here in the middle of nowhere, and it's past mealtime for some of these people. We need to dismiss them so that they'll have time to get back home or at least to a place where they can buy some bread before it gets dark and the marketplace closes."

16. But Jesus said, "They don't need to leave yet. We can feed them right here."

17. Then the disciples said, "How can we feed this huge crowd? All we have is five small loaves of bread and two dried fish!"

18. Jesus said, "Let me have those small loaves and the two dried fish."

19. Soon after they brought Him the loaves and the dried fish, He asked the crowd to find some patches of grass and to sit down and make themselves comfortable. He took the five small loaves and the two dried fish, looked up to heaven, and said the blessing, giving thanks for what He had. Then He broke the loaves in half, and together with the dried fish passed them to the disciples to pass out to the people.

20. And that huge crowd ate bread and fish until they were full. Everyone had enough to eat. When they were finished, the disciples picked up twelve baskets full of what was left.

21. Now five thousand men were in that crowd, not counting the women and children.

22. When the people learned what had really happened, the effect was electrifying. Prompted by the disciples, they

immediately started whispering to each other about making Jesus their king. Jesus sensed what the people were planning and knew that the disciples had started it all. So He told them to get into their boat and go back across the lake and said that He would meet them later on the other side. Then He dismissed the people, telling them it was time to go back home. He spoke with such authority that none dared disobey.

23. When everyone had gone, He climbed a nearby hill overlooking the lake, to be alone and to spend the evening in prayer while keeping His eyes on His disciples who were supposed to go back across the lake.

24. The disciples went down to the boat but hesitated to go, but seeing that Jesus wasn't going to join them, they finally decided to leave. As they rowed, they grumbled. When they got halfway across the lake, a storm hit. Soon the waves were washing over the sides of the boat, and the wind was blowing them completely off course in spite of all their efforts.

25. It was midnight before they finally gave up. After hours of rowing as hard as they could, they just let the boat toss in the waves. They were sure this was their last hour. But Jesus was watching them. From the hill where He was, He could see the little storm hit the lake, and saw how hard the disciples worked to keep the boat on course. When they finally gave up, He decided to go and help them.

26. He made His way down the hill and then walked on the surface of the water toward the boat with waves beating all around him. When the disciples saw Jesus, they thought He was a ghost coming to get them and they cried out to God for help.

27. Jesus responded to their cry and called out, "Don't be afraid! It's me! Jesus!"

28. Then Peter called back, "Lord! If that's really you, let me walk to you on the water!"

29. Over the noise of the storm, Jesus shouted, "Come!" So Peter jumped over the side of the little boat and into the waves. He found that he too could stand on the

water! Then he started walking toward Jesus.

30. Peter began to feel quite proud of what he could do and turned to look at his fellow disciples. When he turned back again to look at Jesus a huge wave came between them. Peter got scared and started to sink! He cried out, "Lord, I'm going down! Please save me!"

31. Jesus quickly came to where he was, reached out, grabbed his outstretched hand, and pulled him up. Then Jesus said to Peter, "Why were you so proud and self-confident? You should have kept your eyes and thoughts on me and you would have stayed on top of the water and wouldn't have started to sink. You need to learn to trust me."

32. Then Jesus and Peter walked back to the boat, and as soon as they took hold of the sides of the boat, the storm stopped, and they got in.

33. Then the disciples fell on their knees in gratitude and said, "We have no more doubt, Lord. You are the Son of God!" And they worshiped Him.

34. Just as dawn was breaking, they arrived on the other side of the lake.

35. When the people there found out who these fishermen were and that Jesus was with them, they sent out the word. Soon people were coming from everywhere.

36. They begged Jesus to heal them and believed that they would be healed if they could only touch Him. And everyone who did touch Him was healed.

CHAPTER 15

1. **After** this experience, Jesus had another encounter with the scribes and Pharisees who had come up to Galilee from Jerusalem. They asked Jesus,

2. "Why don't your disciples keep the customs of our people? We never see them wash their hands the way the Pharisees do before they eat."

3. Jesus said to them, "Why don't the scribes and Pharisees keep God's Law? Why are they so concerned about keeping man-made customs when some of these customs are contrary to the very intention of God's Law?"

4. For example, God says, 'Respect your father and mother.' Now under the old government, he who cursed his parents and rejected them was put to death. He was required to take care of them.

5. This commandment is still in force, and a man is expected to take care of his parents. However, you interpret the commandment to mean that whoever dedicates his money and property to the Temple can live off of it all his life, but he can't use a penny of it for his parents, even if they're in need.

6. If his parents ask him for help, all he has to do is say, 'My money has been dedicated to the Lord, so you'll have to get help from somewhere else.' These kinds of customs undermine the whole purpose of God's Law.

7. You hypocrites! Isaiah was correct when he spoke for God and prophesied about you saying,

8. 'The time will come when my people will talk a lot about me and speak well of me, but their hearts aren't in it. They don't really love me.'

9. All their worships are meaningless because their customs undermine everything I say."

10. Then Jesus turned to the people and said, "Listen, I want you to understand what I'm saying.

11. It's not so much what goes into a person's mouth that makes him unclean, but what comes out of his mouth. That's what makes him unclean, not whether he washed his hands before eating."

12. Then the disciples quietly spoke to Jesus, "Did you know that you offended the Pharisees when you spoke to them the way you did?"

13. Jesus answered them and said, "What you need to understand is that in some ways God treats people like plants. The ones that do not take in the spiritual nutrients provided for them, but prefer to take in the nutrients of evil, will eventually have to be rooted up.

14. Don't worry about the feelings of the Pharisees. No matter what you do or say to them, they won't be happy with you. They're like blind guides and are followed by those who are blind. If the

blind are leading the blind, they'll both fall into the ditch."

15. Peter said, "Lord, please explain to us what you said to the Pharisees."

16. Jesus said, "You mean to tell me you didn't understand what I was saying?"

17. Let me make it plain. Whatever you eat goes into your mouth, down to your stomach, through your intestines, and then out as human waste.

18. But the things that come out of your mouth come from your heart and from what you're thinking. Now if your thoughts and feelings are bad and you express them, it'll only make you feel worse because you'll reinforce what you're already thinking.

19. All kinds of things come out of people's mouths--from murder to adultery and from lying to blaspheming.

20. These are the things that hurt a man. But to eat without having washed his hands, much less not having washed them a certain way, can't hurt him."

21. **Then** Jesus left that region, crossed the border into the province of Syria, and headed northwest toward the cities of Tyre and Sidon.

22. While Jesus was in the area, a Canaanite woman approached Him and, with tears in her eyes, said, "Have mercy on me, Lord, even though you are a descendant of the royal house of David. My daughter is possessed by a devil."

23. But Jesus, contrary to His nature, completely ignored her as any pious Jew would be expected to do. By seeing this, the disciples thought that Jesus was condoning their prejudice, and even suggested to Jesus that He send her away because she was bothering them.

24. Jesus looked at the woman and said, "My commitment is to help the Israelites, not the Canaanites."

25. Then she fell on her knees in front of Him, and bowed low until her head touched the ground. Again she begged Jesus to help her.

26. But again Jesus rebuffed her by saying, "It's not nice for someone to take a freshly prepared dinner for the family and give it to the dogs."

27. The woman responded by saying,

"That's true Lord, but family dogs are treated well by their owners and are entitled to the leftovers."

28. Then Jesus responded with kindness and compassion as He normally would and said, "Dear woman, you have such strong faith. I want you to know I really do care about you and your daughter. Your request is granted. Your daughter is now well." Then the disciples realized that Jesus was condemning their old way of behavior by showing them a contrast so that they could see the difference between their cold cultural bias and the compassion they should have.

29. After this experience Jesus made His way back down to Galilee to a secluded spot near the lake. There He climbed a little hill to sit and rest awhile.

30. But soon the crowds came bringing their sick. Some were lame, others were blind, mute, or handicapped in some other way. Jesus healed them all.

31. The crowd was amazed when they heard the mute speak, saw the lame walk, and realized that the blind could see. Then they started singing and praising and glorifying the God of Israel.

32. This continued off and on for the next three days. On the last day Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "Most of these people have been here since we first came and haven't had much of anything to eat. We can't send them away hungry because some of them are so weak they wouldn't make it home."

33. His disciples said, "Where are we going to get food to feed all these people? We're miles from anywhere."

34. Jesus asked, "Don't we have something we can share? They said, "All we have are seven small loaves and a couple of little fish."

35. Then Jesus turned to the crowd and asked them to sit down.

36. He reached over and took the loaves and the fish the disciples were holding and said the blessing, thanking God for what they had. Then He started passing out the loaves and the fish to the disciples, asking them to serve the people.

37. After everyone had eaten, the disciples picked up seven baskets of leftovers.

38. The number of people that Jesus fed that day was four thousand men, not counting the women and children that were there.

39. Jesus then dismissed the crowd and sent the people home. He walked down to the Lake of Galilee and got into one of the fishing boats and traveled south along the coast to Magadan.

CHAPTER 16

1. **When** the Pharisees and Sadducees heard what had happened and that Jesus was in the area, they asked Him to give them some irrefutable evidence that He was the Son of God.

2. Then Jesus said to them, "When you see a beautiful sunset, don't you usually say that tomorrow will be a beautiful day?

3. And when you see an angry- looking sky in the morning, don't you usually say that today we'll have bad weather? If you can interpret the sky, why is it so hard for you to interpret the miracles that I've already done, and accept them as evidence?

4. The real reason you're asking for some irrefutable evidence is that you don't want to accept me for who I really am because then you'd have to change your ways. But God will give no such evidence, except evidence that's similar to the experience of the prophet Jonah." And when the Pharisees and Sadducees heard Him make reference to Jonah, which they had heard Him make before, they turned and left.

5. By now the disciples were hungry because they had not eaten for some time.

6. Jesus said to them, "You really need to be careful not to eat the bread that's been leavened and distributed by the Pharisees and Sadducees.

7. They tried to figure out what Jesus meant and concluded that what He was telling them was never to depend on others for bread, but always try to provide their own bread.

8. When Jesus overheard what they were saying, He said to them, "You're so concerned about eating that you don't understand what I'm trying to tell you. Why would you conclude that I told you

not to depend on other people for bread?

9. Have you already forgotten how we fed five thousand men and their families with just five small loaves of bread and two dried fish and still had lots left over?

10. And what about when we fed four thousand men with their families on seven small loaves and a couple of dried fish just a few days ago, and how many basketsful were left then?

11. Why is it that you don't understand what I meant when I told you not to accept the bread of the Pharisees and Sadducees? I wasn't talking about eating, because eating is not the problem."

12. Finally it dawned on the disciples that Jesus was not talking about bread, but about the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

13. Then Jesus decided to leave Galilee and head north to the city of Caesarea Philippi. It was here that He asked the disciples, "Who do people really think I am?"

14. They said, "Some people think you're John the Baptist come back to life. Others think you're Elijah returned from heaven. Then there are those who think you're Jeremiah or one of the other prophets raised to life."

15. Then Jesus said, "It seems as if everyone thinks of me as a prophet. Now who do you say I am?"

16. Peter spoke up and said, "We believe that you're the One who was to come, the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

17. Jesus said, "Bless you, Peter, you said this with such conviction that I know it didn't just come from you, but as a direct revelation to you from the Father.

18. Now don't become over-confident because of this. You're still like a rolling stone; in fact, that's what your name means. But the word that comes from the Father is the rock on which my church will be built and the gates of wickedness will not be able to stand up against it.

19. In the word from God will be found the keys to the kingdom of heaven. You can be sure that whatever you do, if it's according to Scripture, it will be approved by heaven. But anything you do that is contrary to Scripture will not be sanctioned

by heaven."

20. Then Jesus told the disciples that they should not agitate the people or the Pharisees with the question of who He was, that is, whether He was the Messiah or a prophet raised from the dead, because this could cause a reaction which would restrict His travels and hinder His ministry.

21. He also He outlined for them the events that would soon take place leading to His crucifixion. His arrest would be initiated by the chief priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees. Then He would be killed, but on the third day after His crucifixion, He would rise again.

22. When Peter heard all this, he took Jesus aside and spoke to Him personally and said, "God forbid that this should happen to you. Now stop talking like that!"

23. But Jesus looked Peter straight in the eye and said, "Peter, a minute ago you were inspired by heaven when you said that I was the Messiah, but now you're talking as if you're inspired by the devil. You're not thinking straight. You're talking like anyone else off the street instead of one of my disciples."

24. Then Jesus turned back to the group and said to His disciples, "If you still want to follow me after I have told you what will happen to me, then you need to forget about your wish to have me drive out the Romans and free Israel, because that's not what I came to do. I came to preach the gospel and be crucified. So you, too, must be willing to sacrifice your life for the sake of the gospel.

25. In fact, anyone who is only interested in the affairs of this present life will eventually end up losing eternal life, but the person who is willing to lose everything for the privilege of following me will not only do good in this life but also have eternal life.

26. After all, what value is there in gaining the whole world and losing your own soul? Is there anything worth more than living forever?

27. Now at the end of time when I come again surrounded by my Father's glory and accompanied by all the angels in heaven, then I'll personally reward you

and every other person based on the values and priorities he has chosen to live by.

28. And before I'm crucified, I'll give some of you a glimpse of my second coming."

CHAPTER 17

1. Only about six days later Jesus picked out Peter, James, and John, leaving the other disciples with the people, and went to the top of Mount Tabor which is not far from Nazareth to give them a preview of His second coming.

2. Here Jesus was transfigured. While praying some distance from the disciples, His face suddenly became as bright as the sun. As He stood up, His whole body was bathed in light.

3. Then Moses and Elijah appeared and stood next to Him and talked with Him, encouraging Him to go on to Jerusalem even though He would be crucified because His death would give eternal life to millions of people.

4. When Peter saw and heard all of this, he forgot himself and, in his enthusiasm, spoke and said: "Lord, this is great! What we need is to do is build some tabernacles here! One for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah!"

5. While he was still talking to the others about what to do for the Lord, a cloud brilliantly illuminated passed overhead, and a voice spoke from behind it and said, "This is my Son whom I dearly love. Listen to Him!"

6. When the disciples heard that voice, they were so afraid that they covered their faces and threw themselves on the ground.

7. They were still shaking when Jesus walked up to them, touched them, and said, "You can get up now. You don't need to be afraid anymore."

8. When they uncovered their faces and looked up, they saw no one but Jesus, and He looked the same as He always had.

9. As they made their way down the mountains, Jesus said to them, "Now don't tell anyone what you saw until after my resurrection because it will only cause a lot of misunderstanding and even jealousy among the other disciples."

10. The three of them responded by

saying, "We thought Elijah had come down from heaven to announce the beginning of your kingdom on earth, but he didn't. Then why do we teach that before the end of all things Elijah has to come first?"

11. Jesus said, "It's true, Elijah will have to come first.

12. He's already been here, but the people didn't really listen to him or recognize his mission, so they killed him. And they'll kill me too."

13. Then the disciples realized that He was talking about John the Baptist and that the coming of Elijah had to do with preaching Elijah's message and reforming the nation, not setting up a kingdom.

14. As soon as they reached the base of the mountain, a man came running to Jesus, fell on his knees in front of Him and with heartbreaking emotion said,

15. "Lord, have mercy on me and my son. He seems to have lost his mind! He has no control over himself and often throws himself into the fire or jumps into the water.

16. So I brought him all the way here to have your disciples heal him, but they can't. And now the scribes and Pharisees are scorning them and me."

17. Then Jesus quietly said to Himself, "What am I going to do with such faithless disciples? Will I ever be able to teach them the proper use of faith?" Then He said to the man, "Bring your boy here. Let me see him."

18. When the boy came, the demon threw the boy on the ground and tormented him. Then Jesus rebuked the demon, and the demon left, and the boy was healed.

19. Later, when the disciples were alone with Jesus, they asked Him, "Why couldn't we heal that boy and cast out the demon from him?"

20. Jesus answered saying, "It was because of your own inflated ego and your lack of dependency on God. If you have faith in God and depend on Him no matter how fearful you are as you move ahead, you will be able to face anything that comes your way. You'll be able to say to the mountains that face you, 'Out of my way!' and God will help you work out your

problems. What you thought was so awesome will disappear or become manageable for you. You'll be surprised what obstacles you'll be able to overcome.

21. But the kind of faith in God and dependence on Him that helps you to know when to cast out demons comes only after you sincerely pray and fast, not just by having faith on the spur of the moment."

22. Before they left that part of Galilee, Jesus tried again to prepare them for what was coming. "It won't be long now," He said, "before I'll be betrayed and turned over to the priests. They will be glad to have me in their grasp.

23. They will have me arrested and crucified, but on the third day I will rise again." The disciples became depressed when they heard this. They really didn't understand what it was all about.

24. When they arrived in Capernaum, they were stopped by the tax collectors. One of them asked Peter, "Don't you fellows pay taxes?"

25. Peter answered, "Of course we do!" Later when Jesus and the disciples were enjoying the hospitality of a friend and were eating together, Jesus, having anticipated Peter's question about paying taxes, asked him, "Peter, from whom does a king collect taxes? The members of his own family, or from the people? What do you think?"

26. Without hesitation Peter said, "From the people, of course!" Then Jesus said, "If that's the case, then the members of the king's family are free, aren't they?"

27. But to avoid further misunderstanding and controversy about why I don't pay taxes, go down to the lake, throw in a fishing line, and you'll catch a fish. Then open its mouth and you'll find a small gold coin stuck in its throat. Take the coin and then go pay the necessary taxes for all of us."

CHAPTER 18

1. **One** day, when they were sitting in the marketplace, the disciples were discussing what would determine a person's greatness in the kingdom of heaven. They asked Jesus what He thought about it.

2. Jesus called a mother with a small

child over to Him. Tenderly He took the small child in His arms, and admitting its innocence said,

3. "Unless you become as morally innocent and as harmless to others as this small child, there is no way you can even be admitted into God's kingdom, much less be considered great.

4. Such moral innocence comes to adults only by choice. The person who chooses to be as innocent as a little child and acts accordingly is the one who is great in the sight of heaven.

5. And anyone who values such innocence not only in himself but also in others has received the message of the kingdom.

6. As for anyone who depreciates or mistreats those who possess such innocence, it would be better for all if such a person were not around. What he deserves is to have a stone tied around his neck and be thrown into the middle of the lake.

7. I feel badly that such differences have to exist in this world, but I feel particularly sorry for the person who contributes to such wickedness.

8. That's why it's better to sacrifice anything that stands in the way of you choosing to be innocent, even if it costs you a hand or a foot, because it's better to be physically handicapped or less successful now, than to be great in this life and to lose out on the next.

9. If, for example, your eye is placing a wrong value on things for you, be willing to lose your eye to keep your innocence. If you have to make a choice, it's better not to be great and live forever than to lose your innocence and have everything end with this life.

10. Now don't think that little children are a nuisance or that they're in your way. Each one has two angels watching over it and encouraging all the good that they can.

11. And my mission is the same as that of the angels, which means I'm here to help save that which is lost." Then Jesus blessed the little child and gave it back to its mother.

12. "Let me ask you something," Jesus said to His disciples. "If a man has one hundred sheep and just one of them gets

lost, what does he do? Doesn't he leave the others at home for someone else to look after and personally go out and search every valley and climb every mountain to find that one lost sheep?

13. And when he finds it, what does he do? He picks it up, puts it on his shoulder, and for a moment, forgets all about the other ninety nine sheep which are safely at home and rejoices over this one sheep that he found.

14. That's how your heavenly Father feels about every child of His, whether it is an infant or an adult.

15. In practice this means that if a fellow believer does something to hurt you, you should go and talk with him, no matter how painful that may be. And if the two of you can come to an understanding, you're brothers again.

16. Now, if he won't listen to you, then ask two other believers to go with you so that whatever the two of you talk about can be verified.

17. If he refuses to listen to them, take it to the church, and if he doesn't listen to the church, then treat him as one who first needs to be brought back to the Lord.

18. You need to remember that people generally have a lot of common sense and a pretty good idea of what is right and wrong. So do you. You know what behavior heaven will approve and what behavior it won't approve.

19. If two or more of you pray about something which is in harmony with heaven, you can expect that my Father will answer your prayer.

20. In fact, wherever two or more of you meet together for prayer, I'm right there with you."

21. **Then** Peter asked Jesus, "How many times do you think I should be willing to forgive my brother? Seven times?"

22. Jesus said, "Peter, it is not a question of how many times, but a question of your own attitude. If your attitude is right, you'll be willing to forgive him hundreds of times because you love him.

23. Let me illustrate what I mean. A certain king decided to check on his servants to see how well they were doing their jobs.

24. When he checked into their performance, he found that one man had embezzled over a hundred thousand dollars.

25. Now since the man had spent it all, the king, according to the custom of the land, had to confiscate the man's property and sell his family as slaves to recover as much of the kingdom's money as possible.

26. The servant went to the king, fell on his knees, and begged for mercy. 'Lord,' he said, 'please forgive me and I promise I will pay back every cent I owe you.'

27. The king's heart was touched. He felt sorry for the man and his family, forgave him, paid the whole amount himself, and kept the man on as his servant.

28. Now this same man got up off his knees, thanked the king, and promptly went out to find a fellow-servant who owed him a hundred dollars. When the man found him, he grabbed the fellow-servant by the throat and demanded that he immediately pay.

29. Then this man fell on his knees, asked for forgiveness and mercy, and promised to pay back every last cent.

30. But the man he owed the money to just would not listen and turned him over to the police, who threw him into jail until his family paid what he owed.

31. When some of the king's servants saw what happened, they could hardly believe it. They felt sorry for the man in jail and for his family, so they went and told the king.

32. The king asked to see the embezzler whom he had just forgiven and said to him, 'You are more of a scoundrel than I thought. I forgave you a hundred thousand dollars, after you promised you would pay it back, and I continued you in your job simply because you asked me to.'

33. Now shouldn't you have shown your gratitude to me by being as forgiving and merciful to your fellow-servant as I was to you? But you weren't, were you?'

34. The king felt badly, but this time decided to turn the embezzler over to the police until his family paid every last cent he owed.

35. This is the way my heavenly Father feels when you don't forgive your brother and have mercy on him in the same way

you were forgiven and were shown mercy. In other words, my Father can't forgive you, as much as He wants to, if you don't forgive others."

CHAPTER 19

1. **After** this, Jesus left Galilee and circled back down into Judea from across the Jordan.

2. Even here the crowds followed Him and He healed them.

3. Also, the Pharisees came out to see Him, but for different reasons. They wanted to trap Jesus in His own words so that they could bring an accusation against Him to the authorities. They asked Him, "Is it right for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason he comes up with?"

4. Jesus answered and said, "Haven't you read what the Scriptures say about the kind of relationship a man should have with his wife? In the beginning when God created the human race, He started it with two people, a man and a woman to act in unison.

5. This is the reason a man is willing to leave his father and his mother for a wife, and God expects him to keep her and love her. They are to be one in spirit and in love.

6. They are not really two people, but more like two parts of one person. Therefore, if a man wants to carry out God's original plan, he shouldn't divorce his wife because what God has joined together man must not separate."

7. Then they asked Him, "If that's so, then why did Moses say it's all right to get divorced as long as it's legal and put in writing?"

8. Jesus said, "Moses made this rule because men were divorcing their wives over the least little thing. So he made this rule to reduce the divorce rate and allowed for divorce only under the most unusual circumstances. Divorce has never been part of God's plan, as you well know.

9. Let me tell you that whoever divorces his wife for any other reason than unfaithfulness, and then remarries, is living in adultery. And a man who marries a woman, who was divorced or who divorced her husband over some trivial

matter, is only perpetuating the evil and is therefore also living in adultery."

10. Then Jesus' disciples got into a discussion with Him saying, "If those are the restrictions on divorce, then it's better not to get married at all."

11. Jesus answered, "If you can't tolerate having a marriage partner, then don't get married. But there are men who can carry their married responsibilities very well."

12. This partially depends on a person's background and a number of other factors that may have shaped his suitability for marriage. Then there are some people who choose a profession that is not conducive to marriage. So these are some things you have to take into consideration."

13. When Jesus' discussion with the disciples was over, mothers with their children crowded in to see Jesus, asking Him to pray for them and to bless them. The disciples were upset over this and scolded the mothers for bringing their children and bothering Jesus with their insignificant requests.

14. Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "Don't stop these mothers from bringing their children to me. This kind of caring and affection is what heaven is all about."

15. So Jesus received the mothers and the children and prayed for them and blessed them. After He had blessed each one, He continued on His way to Jerusalem.

16. One day a well-to-do young man came to Jesus and asked Him, "Righteous Master, what good things should I do to make sure I get to heaven?"

17. Jesus said, "Why do you ask me what to do to get to heaven? God is the only One who can answer that question; yet I'll give you my answer. If you want to make sure that you'll get to heaven, keep God's commandments."

18. The rich young man asked, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "The Ten Commandments; the ones which tell you not to murder, commit adultery, steal, or lie, and

19. to respect your parents, and care about your neighbor as you would about yourself."

20. The young man answered and said, "I've kept these commandments all my life. Yet something seems to be missing. What do you think it is?"

21. Jesus looked at him with great compassion and said, "If you want some real evidence that you'll be in heaven, you need to look into your own heart to see if heaven is there. Then you need to test it to see if it's genuine. So I would suggest that you sell everything you have and give it to the poor people who need some way to get on their feet again, and then come and live with me. That will show you where your heart really is. Do you think you could do this?"

22. The young man thought for a minute, knowing that if he answered yes, Jesus would expect him to follow through with it. So he avoided the question and turned around and walked away because he was very rich.

23. Then Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "Rich people have a much more difficult time learning to depend on God than poor people do."

24. That's why it's almost easier for a fully loaded camel to crawl through the Needle Gate in the wall of Jerusalem than for a rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven."

25. When the disciples heard this, they couldn't believe it. They had been taught that rich people were being blessed and prospered because they were so good. So they asked Jesus, "If the rich people can't make it to heaven, how can anyone else?"

26. Jesus looked at them with concern and said, "The way of salvation always looks more difficult to humans than to God. With God nothing is impossible."

27. Then Peter responded, "If that's so, Lord, what about us? We've left everything to follow you. If rich people can enjoy all their riches and still be saved, then why are we going around the country like beggars and going through all this sacrifice?"

28. Jesus looked around the circle at all His disciples and said, "You men have willingly left everything to follow me. I know that. When I come again and restore all things and sit and reign as the rightful

King over the whole earth, you'll be there right beside me in charge of the twelve divisions of people making up my kingdom.

29. And not only you, but anyone who willingly leaves everything he owns, including his brothers and sisters, his parents, or his own wife and children for my sake will receive a hundred percent return in spiritual blessings in this life and the gift of eternal life as well.

30. Many people you would expect to be in heaven won't be there. And others you would not expect to be there will be."

CHAPTER 20

1. "You see, the question of who will get to heaven is like what happened to some farm workers one day. During harvest season a farmer went down to the marketplace at about six o'clock one morning to find some men who were looking for work.

2. When he found some, he made them an offer; he would pay them so much per day. After they reached an agreement, he hired them and put them to work.

3. The day wore on, and at around nine o'clock the farmer needed more workers, so he went back to the marketplace. When he found men standing there looking for work he said to them,

4. 'Come, you can work for me, and if you're willing to trust me, I'll pay you more than a fair wage.' They agreed, and he hired them and sent them out to work.

5. Soon the farmer realized that he needed even more workers, so at noon he went back to the marketplace, and again at three o'clock in the afternoon. Each time men were standing there looking for work. And they all agreed to trust the farmer for their wages.

6. As late as five o'clock, the farmer quickly went down to the marketplace to pick up some extra men to finish the harvesting before dark. He asked those standing there, 'Have you been out of work all day?'

7. They said, 'Yes, we've been going around from farm to farm all day long looking for work, but no one needed us. So we decided to come here to the market-

place hoping to be picked up for at least a few hours of work before it gets dark.' The farmer said, 'You're hired. Come and work for me, and when we finish today's harvesting, I'll pay you more than a fair wage.' They gladly went to work.

8. Late in the evening, when the harvesting was done, the farmer said to his supervisors, 'Call the men together so that I can pay them, and let's begin with those who were hired last.'

9. The men he had picked up at five o'clock lined up first and when they came up to the pay table, the owner paid them for a full day's work as he did all the others.

10. At first the men who had been hired at six o'clock that morning became very excited. They reasoned that, since they had worked all day, they should get proportionately more. But when they came up to the pay table and got the same as the others, they were angry.

11. They complained to the farmer, accusing him of unfair labor practices and even threatened him with bodily harm.

12. They said, 'Some of these men worked only a few hours, and you paid them a full day's wage. That's the same amount you gave us. But we worked all day long and through the hottest part of the day, and now we get the same as they do? That is grossly unfair, to say the least!'

13. The farmer listened and then said to them, 'Didn't we agree on a certain wage for a full day's work? And isn't this what I paid you? How then do you figure that I was unfair?'

14. Take your pay and go home and be glad someone hired you today. I decided to pay all of the workers a full day's wage because they needed it to feed their families. It wasn't their fault that they weren't hired earlier.

15. Besides, I do have a right to do what I want with my own money. Why then is it wrong for me to give them what I want? Is that unfair?'

16. Well, that's the way it'll be when God's harvest ends. You'll find people in heaven you never thought would be there. And the reason they are is that they have a good attitude. They gladly did what they could with no thought of pay. Then

there will be others who have worked very hard for God whom you would expect to be there, but they won't be, because they thought only of the reward of being looked up to."

17. As Jesus continued to make His way to Jerusalem, crowds of people followed Him. One day He took His disciples aside from the crowd to rest a bit and said to them,

18. "Not long after we arrive in Jerusalem, someone will turn me over to the priests, and after they've tried me for heresy and sedition, they'll sentence me to death.

19. They'll turn me over to the Roman authorities, who will first mock me, then scourge me, and finally crucify me. But, on the third day, I'll rise from the dead." The disciples couldn't accept what Jesus was telling them. The thought of this terrible thing befalling the One whom they loved so dearly, was more than their hearts could bear.

20. It was while they were resting there in Jericho before going on to Jerusalem that the mother of James and John came to Jesus asking Him if He would be so kind as to do something for her.

21. Jesus said, "What is it that you would like me to do for you?" She said, "Lord, when you set up your kingdom, would you let my two sons sit next to you in your kingdom, one of them on your right and the other on your left?"

22. Jesus answered her and said, "Mother, I know you love your sons, but you don't realize what you're asking. I don't arbitrarily choose certain men to sit next to me in my kingdom. First they will have to ask themselves the same question that I have had to ask myself, which is this: Am I willing to be guided by the Holy Spirit and be committed to the way of life He chooses for me, no matter what the cost, even if it means crucifixion?" When James and John, who had come along with their mother, heard this, they said, "Yes, Lord, we are willing!"

23. Then Jesus turned to them and said, "I know you are willing. And you will dearly pay for your commitment to me just as I will have to pay for my commit-

ment to my Father. You'll be arrested, tried, sentenced, and taken to be executed. Beyond this, I can't say who will sit next to me in my kingdom. That's my Father's decision."

24. Now when the other disciples heard about James' and John's request, they were angry with them.

25. So Jesus called them all together and said, "You know how people love to exercise power over other people, that their success is measured by their ability to control others.

26. But my kingdom is different, and your standards should be different. Heaven measures your success by what you do for others, not by what they do for you.

27. If you want to be important, then you should be the one most willing to serve.

28. This is what the kingdom of heaven is all about. In my Father's house everyone cares about everyone else. So I haven't come to exercise authority over people, but to serve them; yes, even to die for them."

29. Soon after this conversation, Jesus and His disciples left Jericho and continued on their way toward Jerusalem. As before, huge crowds of people followed them.

30. On the way, two blind men who were sitting by the roadside begging, heard that Jesus was coming their way, and as the crowds began to pass by, they called out, "Lord, Son of David, please have mercy on us!"

31. Some from the crowd tried to stop them from shouting, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, please have mercy on us!"

32. Jesus heard them, and when He came to where they were, He stopped and asked, "What is it that you would like me to do for you?"

33. They said, "Lord, please open our eyes so that we can see again."

34. With great compassion Jesus reached out and touched their eyes. Instantly they could see. As Jesus continued on His way, the two men followed Him praising His name.

CHAPTER 21

1. As Jesus and His disciples approached Jerusalem, they stopped near the little village of Bethphage close to the Mount of Olives. Jesus said to two of His disciples,

2. "Go into the village, and as soon as you enter, you will find a mother donkey standing there with her colt, and she'll be tied to a post. Just untie them and bring them here.

3. If anyone should try to stop you, tell that person, 'The Lord needs to borrow these animals for just a little while, and we promise to bring them back.' Then you will be allowed to take them."

4. This was according to the prophecy of Zechariah who said,

5. "Tell the people of Zion, 'Look! Your king is coming! He's entering into your city, quietly and humbly riding on a donkey.'"

6. The two disciples did what Jesus asked them to do.

7. They went into the little village and found a mother donkey standing with her young one, just as He had said. They untied her and brought her to Jesus. Then, suspecting that He might ride the donkey into Jerusalem as the kings of old had done during their inauguration, they took off their coats and spread them on the donkey for Jesus to sit on.

8. The people quickly caught the significance of all this, and the excitement of anticipation rippled through the crowd. They, too, took off their coats and spread them in front of the donkey as Jesus rode along. Others in the crowd cut off palm branches and spread them out in the road.

9. Then the crowd started singing and chanting for joy, "The Son of David will save us! He comes in the name of the Lord! Thanks be to God! Bless His name!"

10. By the time they reached the gates of Jerusalem, the whole city was caught up in the excitement. People were running together from everywhere asking each other, "Who is this man they're shouting about?"

11. Those in the procession said, "This is the prophet Jesus who's come down from Nazareth in Galilee to be our King!"

12. When the procession reached the Temple, Jesus got down from the donkey and went inside and the two disciples took the donkey and her colt back to the village. Inside, the Temple foyer was full of merchants buying and selling sheep and doves for sacrifice and exchanging money for temple currency. When Jesus saw this, He walked up to the money exchangers, tipped over the tables, one after another, and told them to get out. Then He went over to where they were selling animals, opened the cages, untied the sheep, and turned to the vendors,

13. "The Scriptures say, 'My house is a house of prayer, not a marketplace,' but you've turned it into a den of thieves."

14. When the confrontation was over and everything in the Temple was still, the blind and the lame came in as quietly and reverently as they could to see Jesus. He responded in love to their requests and eventually healed every one of them.

15. Soon the priests and merchants ventured back inside, and as they did so, they heard the children singing, saw the lame and the blind being healed, and heard the people praising God and chanting over and over, "Blessed be the Messiah, the Son of David." This really upset the priests.

16. They made their way over to Jesus and said, "Can't you hear what these people and their children are saying about you?" Jesus said, "Yes, I do. Haven't you read in the Psalms where David says, 'True praise and appreciation is most often expressed by grateful parents and their children'?"

17. Then Jesus left the Temple and made His way out of town to the nearby little village of Bethany, where He stayed overnight with His friend Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha.

18. Before breakfast the next morning, He made His way back to Jerusalem.

19. He was very hungry that morning so, when He saw a fig tree in the distance, He eagerly headed toward it. But when He came up to the fig tree, He found no fruit; all it had on it were lush-looking leaves. Using this experience to teach His disciples about Israel's spiritual condition, He said to the tree, "Since you haven't

produced anything but leaves, from now on you'll not even produce those." As soon as He spoke, the leaves started to shrivel.

20. The disciples were amazed and said, "Look! The leaves are already curling up!"

21. Jesus turned to them and said, "Don't be surprised. If you confidently follow God's leading without questioning everything as the priests do, you'll be able to overcome all kinds of disappointments.

22. When you ask God for help, believe that you will receive it, and He'll help you in ways that will amaze you."

23. **Later** that morning, after they had arrived at the Temple, the priests and the elders came to Jesus as He was teaching the people. They asked, "Who gave you the authority to drive people out of the Temple yesterday and to say the things you're saying?"

24. Jesus looked at them and said, "Let me ask you something first. If you answer my question, then I'll answer yours and tell you from where I get my authority.

25. Was the baptism that John practiced ordained by heaven, or was it his own idea?" The priests went into a huddle, discussed the question for a few minutes, saying to each other, "If we answer that John's mission and baptism was heaven inspired, He'll say, 'Then why didn't you support him and do what he told you?'

26. If we say it was John's own idea, the people will turn against us because they believe that John was a prophet."

27. So they turned to Jesus and said, "We can't answer your question." And Jesus said, "Then I'm under no obligation to answer yours.

28. But let me ask you a different question. What do you think of the father who went to one of his two sons and said, 'Son, could you go and work in the vineyard today and help with the harvest?'

29. And the son said, 'I certainly will not.' But as he thought about it, he changed his mind and went.

30. The father didn't know this, so he went to the other son and said, 'Son, could you go and work in the vineyard today and help with the harvest?' And the son said, 'Sure, father, I'll be happy to go.' But

as he thought about it, he changed his mind and decided not to go.

31. Now which one of these boys obeyed their father?" The priests said, "The first one, of course." Then Jesus said, "You're right, and that's why those who collect your taxes for the Romans and why prostitutes who listened to John and thought about what he said and then decided to change their lives will get to heaven before you will.

32. The reason is obvious: John preached what was right and his baptism was heaven inspired, but you didn't take to heart what he said. Also you remarked about how marvelous it was that the way the tax collectors and the prostitutes responded and how their lives were changed, yet you still didn't take to heart what John said nor did you change your way of thinking.

33. I have another parable for you. A certain landowner planted a vineyard, built a high wall around it to protect it, put a winepress in the middle of it for convenience, constructed a lookout tower to spot thieves, leased out the vineyard to professional grape-growers, and then left the country on business.

34. When it was time for the harvest, he returned home and instructed his regional manager to go check on the grape-growers to see how the harvest was progressing.

35. But the people who had leased the vineyard were upset with each of the regional managers that the landowner sent. So they beat up one, murdered another, and stoned to death a third.

36. The landowner sent other regional managers to check on the harvest, but they were treated the same way.

37. Finally, the landowner said to himself, 'I know what I'll do. I'll send my own son to check on the harvest, for I'm sure they'll respect him.'

38. But when the grape-growers heard that the son was coming, they said to themselves, 'He's not only the owner's son, he's the heir! Let's kill him, and when his father dies, we'll have the right to lay claim to the vineyard for ourselves.'

39. So they let the son come into the vineyard, then grabbed him, dragged him

out to the other side of the wall, and killed him.

40. Now let me ask you, when the landowner hears about this, what do you think he'll do to these people?"

41. The priests answered and said, "He'll have them arrested and tried for murder and then lease out his vineyard to other grape-growers who will recognize the landowner's right to check on the harvest."

42. Jesus said, "You're right. I'm sure you must have read in the Psalms that the stone the Temple builders rejected was later found to have been the much-needed cornerstone. This stone is like the son in the vineyard story—chosen by his father, but rejected by his father's own employees.

43. If you follow through with your plans to kill me, the care of my Father's vineyard will have to be taken from you and leased to people who know how to grow grapes.

44. And anyone accepting me as the much-needed cornerstone shouldn't want to kill me, because by killing me, they will actually end up hurting themselves and sealing their own doom."

45. After hearing these stories and illustrations, the priests knew that Jesus was aware of their plans and that He was speaking about them.

46. How they wished they could get their hands on Him right then and there. But they were afraid to arrest Jesus in public because the people believed He was a prophet.

CHAPTER 22

1. **Then** Jesus turned to the people and said,

2. "The way men and women are selected for the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a certain king whose son was getting married.

3. The king sent out his servants to remind those who had received the royal invitations to get ready for the celebration. Soon his son would be coming back with his bride and the wedding would begin.

4. When everything was ready, the king sent for his servants and told them, 'Go and tell those who were invited that

now is the time to come. Tell them that there will be roasts of veal and lamb and all kinds of special delicacies, and that their king wants them to come to celebrate with him.'

5. Some of those who had been invited didn't take the royal invitation seriously and went about their usual business of selling and farming.

6. Others actually mistreated the king's servants and in some cases killed them.

7. When the king heard about this, he was deeply disappointed. He ordered his soldiers to bring the murderers to trial and to purge the city.

8. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding was ready, but those who were invited didn't come.

9. Now go out into the side roads and whomever you find, invite them to come.'

10. The king's servants went out, and, scattering everywhere, invited anyone they saw to come to the wedding, and the reception hall was overflowing with guests.

11. Then the king came in to meet each of the guests and was introduced to a man who was shabbily dressed.

12. He said to the man, 'Friend, how did you get in without being properly dressed? Aren't you a little presumptuous coming in like this?' The man was speechless because wedding garments had been provided free for everyone.

13. The king called his servants and said, 'Take hold of this man and show him the door!' The embarrassment and remorse of this man were more than he could bear."

14. Then Jesus said, "That's how it is with the King of Heaven. Everyone is given a royal invitation to come to the wedding to celebrate with the King and His Son. Many will come, but few will be properly dressed."

15. After hearing this, the Pharisees left and made plans to trap Jesus in His own words so they might have evidence for His arrest and conviction.

16. So they decided to send some of their brightest members together with the politically minded Herodians to trap Him with questions. They came to Jesus and asked, "Master, we know that you are an honest man and that you teach whatever

you think is right without favoring anyone.

17. So please help us out. Is it right for us to pay taxes to the Romans or not?"

18. Jesus knew what their motives were in asking this question and said, "Why are you trying to trap me with political questions while pretending to be honest?"

19. Let me see the coin you use to pay your taxes with." They searched for a tax coin, found one, and gave it to Him.

20. Then pointing to the coin, He asked them, "Whose picture is this? And whose inscription is on here?"

21. They said, "Caesar's, of course." Then Jesus said, "If that's the case, then give to Caesar what belongs to him and also pay your tithe, which belongs to God."

22. When they heard His answer, they were speechless. So they turned and went back home.

23. **Later** that same day the Sadducees, who deny that there can be a resurrection of bodies, also came to trap Jesus.

24. They said, "Master, Moses told us that if a man dies and leaves no heirs, his brother should marry the widow and have children by her to preserve his brother's name.

25. Now there was a case in which there were seven brothers, and soon after the first one married, he died. Since he had no children, his brother had to marry his wife, which he did.

26. The same thing happened to the second, third, and fourth brother until seven of them had married her.

27. Finally, the woman also died.

28. If there is a resurrection of bodies, whose wife will she be when she gets to heaven? She was married to all seven!"

29. Jesus looked at them and said, "Your ideas about the resurrection are wrong. This one case proves nothing because you're using it, instead of the Scriptures, to prove your point.

30. Your whole argument is based on the relationship of two people in marriage here on earth. Have you ever thought that after the resurrection there might not be any marriages? Or, have you ever thought that God's people could become as the angels, and that in heaven everything

doesn't have to be like it is here?

31. Now the real question about the resurrection is answered, not by looking at the relationship that people have in marriage, but by looking at the power of God and what He can do. Haven't you read what God said about Himself?

32. He said, 'I am the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.' In other words, He is not only the God of the dead, but the God of the living. Sarah is a case in point. She was too old to have a child, but by God's power she did! God can give a body to whomever He wants to."

33. When the people heard Jesus' answer, they were amazed at this lowly carpenter's insight.

34. When the Pharisees heard that the Sadducees didn't succeed in trapping Jesus, they decided to use a lawyer.

35. He came to Jesus thinking to let Him snare Himself, and so he asked:

36. "Master, which do you think is the most important commandment that God gave?" By asking this, the lawyer was hoping to get Jesus to prioritize God's laws and then challenge Him on His reasons for doing so.

37. But instead, Jesus summarized God's laws and said, "You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.

38. This is the first and most important commandment.

39. And the next one is just like it. You should love and value your neighbor as much as you value yourself.

40. You see, the entire law rests on both these principles because they're interrelated; you can't separate them. You can't hurt people without hurting God, no matter how much you say you love Him."

41. Then Jesus turned to the Pharisees and said,

42. "What's your opinion about the Messiah? When He comes, whose descendant do you think He'll be?" They said, "A descendant of David, of course."

43. Then He asked them, "If that is so, then why did David, while under the influence of the Holy Spirit, refer to the Messiah as the Lord? In the Psalms he says,

44. 'The God of heaven will say to the Lord, come, sit on my right hand and share my power until I subdue all your enemies.'

45. Now, if David calls the Messiah the Lord, how can He be both his son and the Lord at the same time?"

46. The Pharisees couldn't answer that question. From that day on they never tried to trap Jesus in His own words again.

CHAPTER 23

1. **Then** Jesus turned to His disciples and to the people and said,

2. "The priests and teachers are ordained to take Moses' place.

3. So, whatever they tell you to do, do it; but don't do it for the same reasons that they do it. Sometimes they'll even ask you to do something they themselves are not willing to do.

4. For example, they'll set up all kinds of ceremonial rules and regulations which the average working person has no time to carry out, and they won't make the slightest attempt to help him or adjust the rules.

5. You see, so many things they do are done for show. That's why they dress in such colorful robes

6. and sit in the most prominent place in the synagogue and at other public gatherings.

7. They also love to have people call them rabbi.

8. But don't you let yourself be caught up into honors and titles. There is only One who is to be honored, and that is God. Everyone else is your brother.

9. Don't look to anyone as your spiritual father or your spiritual source of strength, because there is only one real source of strength, and that is your heavenly Father.

10. In fact, don't even let people call you master teacher, because there is only one who is your Master Teacher, and that is the Messiah.

11. If you want to be great, then go and be helpful to your neighbor and to other people who need help. Anticipate their needs, and then help them the best way you can.

12. Remember, you can decide the kind

of person you want to be. If you always put yourself first, the honor, if it comes at all, won't last. But if you decide to put others first in the best way you can, in time you'll be honored for what you've done and no one can take this away from you."

13. Then, turning back to the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said, "But with the attitude you have, sooner or later you'll self-destruct. The way you act, you repel people and keep them from coming to God, and as a result are keeping many of them out of the kingdom of heaven. Because you're not interested in heaven, you have no patience with those who are trying to get there.

14. In addition, you're money hungry. You don't hesitate to cheat widows out of their small pensions and then with your long public prayers pretend you're righteous. So by your actions you're condemning yourself.

15. And besides this, you will go to any length to convert one person to the truth, both here and overseas, but after that person is converted, he's more likely to be kept out of heaven than before his conversion, because of the way you taught him.

16. Just look at your sense of values; that will show you how blind you are. You tell the people that if they take an oath and swear by the Temple, they can change their oath because it was taken only on the authority of the Temple. But if they take an oath by the gold which covers the furniture of the Temple, they are bound by that oath forever, and if they lie, they'll be prosecuted.

17. How blind can you be? Don't you realize what you're teaching the people to place their values on? How can gold be more important than the Temple? Do expensive decorations give more meaning to religion than what the Temple itself stands for?

18. And you say, 'Taking an oath and swearing by the altar is nothing, but if a man takes an oath and swears by the gift he lays on the altar and changes his mind, then he's guilty of perjury.'

19. How foolish can you be? Which is more important--the gift or the altar which symbolizes sacrificial giving?

20. If a man takes an oath and swears by the altar, he is swearing by everything the altar stands for, which means that he is willing to stay by his word even to his own hurt. This is how God keeps His word.

21. If a man takes an oath and swears by the Temple, he is actually swearing by the One whose Temple it is.

22. It's like a man taking an oath and swearing by heaven; he's actually swearing by the God of heaven, not the stars in the sky.

23. How ignorant can you be! And you consider yourselves to be teachers and priests whom the people should listen to? In your tithing, for example, you tithe every little thing, even the spices you grow in your garden. And that's fine. You should be honest in your tithing, but you've forgotten the most important things such as kindness, truthfulness, and how much you trust God.

24. There's no doubt that you're blind. You strain your drinking water because you're afraid you'll swallow some microscopic creature that's unclean, but according to your misjudgment in spiritual things, you might as well sit down and feast on an unclean animal like a camel or a pig.

25. It's hard to believe that you can be so foolish. All you're concerned about are the externals of religion. You keep polishing your behavior and your interest in God, but inside you're controlled by your own ego, your greed, and your self-centeredness.

26. How blind can you really be? First clean out what's inside your cup, then soon the outside of your cup will become clean as well.

27. At present your lives are hopeless. You're like painted tombstones which look beautiful on the outside, but they're monuments of death.

28. Outwardly your lives look great, but inside you're dead.

29. Speaking of tombstones, how careful you are to keep up the gravesites of the prophets and cover them with flowers.

30. And at the right time you eulogize them and say to the people, 'If we had lived back then, we wouldn't have killed

the prophets as our parents did.'

31. By saying this you're admitting that God's people can turn against prophets and even kill them. So it would seem that, if it happened before, it can happen again.

32. In fact, you're plotting my death right now. So you're doing the same thing your parents did, no matter what you say.

33. You're as slippery as snakes. How do you expect to reap anything else except eternal extinction?

34. My death will not be the end of it. Other prophets and teachers will follow me and you'll plot their death, too. You'll have them whipped in your synagogues, give consent for their death, and persecute them wherever they show their faces.

35. This means that your generation will soon reap the results of all the rejection and killing of prophets. The killing of good people began with Abel, who was killed by his own brother. Then your people killed such prophets as Zacharias who was killed while he was standing in the Temple next to the altar.

36. The consequences of all of this will come to a head in your own lifetime not many years after you crucify me."

37. Then Jesus expressed His own agony over His people and said, "Oh, Jerusalem, how much I care about you, even if you have killed the prophets. I would so much like to protect you from what is coming, just as a mother hen is eager to protect her chicks and covers them with her own wings. But you are so indifferent.

38. Your city is now left to itself. This has been our last conversation.

39. You and I can no longer communicate; we can no longer understand each other. If only you would change your attitude and be willing to listen to the prophets and to those who come in my name, instead of killing them."

CHAPTER 24

1. **Then** Jesus left the Temple, and as they walked outside, His disciples pointed to the various parts of the temple and to the massive stones out of which it was built.

2. But Jesus turned to them and said,

"You need to take a good look at the Temple because it won't be in use many more years. The time is fast coming when not one of its massive stones supporting the innermost part of the sanctuary will be left standing on another."

3. The disciples were amazed at this, so when they reached the top of the Mount of Olives, which was just outside the city, and had made themselves comfortable, they quietly asked Him, "When will these things that you mentioned happen? Will that be when you set up your kingdom and when everything will come to an end?"

4. Jesus looked at them and said, "The most important thing for you to be careful about while I'm gone is not to be deceived.

5. A number of men will come and preach in my name, claiming to be commissioned by me and even claiming the right to take my place on earth. Many people will believe them and be deceived.

6. Now before the end comes, there will be an increasing number of wars, each one more terrible and inhuman than the one before, but don't be discouraged or give up your faith, because it is God's plan to let some of these things happen.

7. And these wars will increase in scope as time goes on, with many nations involved at one time. Also, there will be mega-famines in various parts of the world as well as widespread epidemics and severe earthquakes.

8. These natural disasters will be indications that a new kingdom is soon to be born, just as the labor pains of a mother come before her baby is born.

9. Those who are loyal to me will be arrested, put in jail, or killed, no matter what their nationality.

10. No one will be able to hide because even fellow believers will turn against each other. They will hate each other and turn each other over to the authorities.

11. False preaching will be going on everywhere, and many people will believe what they hear, whether it's true or not.

12. Because moral decadence will be prevalent, most people won't know what it is to love and be loved.

13. But those who are loyal to me will be rescued and those of my people who

have died will be resurrected and both groups will be taken to heaven.

14. Now the good news about my kingdom will first be preached around the world and then the end will come.

15. As far as Jerusalem is concerned, when you see the nation referred to by Daniel as the Abomination of Desolation come to your land and surround Jerusalem and then suddenly withdraw its troops--and the careful reader will understand which nation I'm referring to--

16. that will be the time to flee the city and go to the mountains.

17. You'll have to move fast, so they won't be aware of what you're doing. When that happens, don't try to pack or to get someone to move you out of town; that would be too obvious. Besides, there won't be time for that.

18. If you're working in the field, don't go home to change your clothes. Just keep walking away from the city.

19. Those days will be very hard on young women, especially those who are pregnant or who are still nursing their babies.

20. So you need to pray now that this won't happen during the winter months or on the Sabbath, when everyone is supposed to be at home resting.

21. Life won't be easy in those days. People will experience much physical suffering, not only when Jerusalem is destroyed but also in the centuries that follow.

22. Finally, man's inhumanity to man and the persecution of those who are loyal to me will be so widespread that, unless God steps in to shorten the time, my people will perish.

23. Now, during those days, if anyone says to you, 'Christ has come! We saw Him! He was here! He was there!' don't believe them.

24. You'll hear all kinds of reports about people seeing Christ. In fact, the devil will help some of the deceivers by giving them power to work miracles. Their miracles will be so convincing that they'll almost convince the righteous.

25. Now, I'm telling you all this ahead of time so you won't be deceived.

26. If they tell you, 'We saw Christ in the desert,' don't go out to see whether it's true. Or if they say, 'We met Him in one of the secret meetings He was holding,' don't believe it,

27. because the real coming of Christ will be as noticeable as the lightning which flashes across the sky from east to west. That's how visible the second coming will be.

28. Before that, there will be many signs that will let you know that the end of all things is close, just as when you see vultures grouping in the distance and know that a carcass of some kind must be nearby.

29. Some of the other signs in the sky, just before my return, will follow after centuries of persecutions. During those days there will be times when the sun will be darkened, the moon will not shine, and some nights falling stars will fill the whole sky. Eventually the sky itself will be in motion.

30. Then I will return and be recognized as the Son of God and come in the clouds with power and great glory, and people everywhere will be frightened at what they see.

31. Angels will circle the globe with the blast of a trumpet and bring together all those who were loyal to God, from one end of the earth to the other.

32. Now learn a lesson from a fig tree: when you see it put out new shoots and leaves, you know that spring is here.

33. In the same way you can tell when the beginning of the end has come and when it's at the door.

34. This present generation will not pass before they see Jerusalem destroyed.

35. What I've told you is as true as the continuance of heaven and earth.

36. Now the exact time when I will come back, only the Father knows, and He hasn't even shared this with the angels.

37. However, just as it was in Noah's day, that's how it'll be just before I come back.

38. All that people thought about in those days was eating, drinking, getting married, and living it up. They did this right up to the very day that Noah and his family went into the ark.

39. They didn't think that what Noah had been preaching would ever happen, until the flood hit. By then it was too late. That's how it'll be in the time of the end, just before I come back. Very few will really believe what my people will be preaching.

40. Most people will go about their duties with very little thought about the future. Those who believe and those who don't will be working together, and one will be ready and the other won't.

41. Mothers will be busy at home, and, again, some will believe and be ready but others won't.

42. So in those days my people really need to stay alert because no one will know the exact day when the gospel will be withdrawn and the human race will be left to itself.

43. However, even though the close of probation will come as quietly and unexpectedly as a thief in the night, each true believer will be like a careful homeowner who eagerly participates in the neighborhood watch so he can be one step ahead of the thief before he breaks into his house.

44. My people need to stay alert, because when they least expect it, probation for the human race will close, and the Son of God will be on His way.

45. Now the way to be alert is to have your heart in tune with God. This will make you like the servant who was faithful and loyal to his master's family while his master was gone.

46. He was happy to carry out his responsibilities and did his work well because he was looking forward to seeing his master again.

47. When the master came back, he promoted his loyal servant and entrusted him with everything he owned.

48. Now if my people's hearts are not in tune with God, that, too, will be evident. They will be like the servant who was unfaithful and disloyal. His behavior told everyone that he thought his master wouldn't come back for a long time.

49. So he started taking advantage of his position, harassed the other servants, exploited the family, and spent most of his time partying.

50. But his master came back unexpectedly and totally surprised him.

51. The master relieved him of all his responsibilities and made a public statement to the fact that his servant had been dismissed because he showed that he was never qualified for the job to begin with. And the servant's remorse was beyond words."

CHAPTER 25

1. **Now**, as Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives and looking through the evening shadows into the valley below, He noticed a house all lit up and decorated to welcome the bridegroom. He drew His disciples' attention to the wedding party and said, "During the time of the end the condition of my people will be similar to what you see happening in the valley. They will be like ten bridesmaids who took their wedding candles and went out to meet the bridegroom.

2. Five of the bridesmaids were wise and made extra preparation, and five of them were foolish and did not.

3. The foolish took only one wedding candle with them.

4. But the wise took an extra candle along.

5. Now the bridegroom was delayed, and while they waited for him to come, they all became drowsy; the foolish carelessly let themselves fall asleep, and even the wise began to doze off.

6. Then, at midnight, the shout went out, 'The bridegroom's coming! Let's go out and meet him!'

7. All the bridesmaids jumped up and lit their wedding candles.

8. But as they joyously made their way out to meet him, they soon saw to their dismay that their wedding candles were nearly gone. Then the foolish bridesmaids turned to the wise bridesmaids and said, 'Please share your extra candles with us! Our candles have nearly gone out, and the bridegroom is still not in sight!'

9. And the wise answered and said, 'We would love to help you, but if we share our extra candles with you, there won't be enough to last, and soon we'll all be in the dark. You need to hurry back

and buy an extra candle for yourselves.'

10. While the foolish bridesmaids were gone to buy some more candles, the bridegroom came. The wise bridesmaids greeted him, and together with the bride, made their way to the bridegroom's house.

11. Soon the foolish bridesmaids arrived and knocked on the door and called out, 'Lord, please open up and let us in!'

12. But the bridegroom said, 'You're too late. I wish I could let you in, but the door is already locked and can't be opened. I have no choice but to keep you out as I would strangers.'

13. So the thing to do during the time of the end is to stay alert and make the extra preparation that's needed in case of delay, because no one will know the day or the hour when probation will close and when the Son of God will come back.

14. **Now** the situation at the end of time can also be described by the experience of a businessman who decided to go to another country to look for some possible markets. Before he left, he called his managers together and divided up their responsibilities.

15. In addition, he gave some of them five thousand dollars. Others he gave two thousand dollars, and still others he gave one thousand dollars, depending on their skill in managing money.

16. Then the servants who received five thousand dollars immediately invested it in the business and soon had five thousand dollars more.

17. Those to whom he had given two thousand dollars did the same thing and in a relatively short time had brought in an additional two thousand dollars worth of business.

18. But the managers to whom he had given one thousand dollars did not invest it in the company, but where they thought best.

19. After some time, the businessman came back from the other country and called his managers together to see what they had done while he was gone.

20. Those who had been given five thousand dollars reported a five thousand dollar gain in business. They said to the chairman, 'Sir, you gave each of us five

thousand dollars. By taking advantage of the opportunities in the business, we were able to double your money.'

21. The board chairman said, 'You did some good thinking and wise planning, and because you handled your responsibilities so well, I'm entrusting you with much more than that. When the meeting is over, let's celebrate.'

22. And those to whom he had given two thousand dollars reported a two thousand dollar gain in business. They said, 'Sir, you gave us two thousand dollars. By careful trading, we were able to double your money, too.'

23. The board chairman said, 'You too did some good thinking and wise planning. So because of this, I'm entrusting you with much more. When this meeting is over, let's all celebrate together.'

24. Next it was the turn of those to whom he had given one thousand dollars to give their report. And they said, 'Sir, we know that you would not expect us to do something with your money that we thought was unwise.'

25. So, rather than investing it in the company where it could be misused, we decided to use it as we thought best, and we can now give it back to you without a loss.'

26. When the owner heard this, he was greatly disappointed and said to them, 'You don't know me very well, do you? Your actions tell me that you thought I was being unreasonable in what I expected of you.'

27. But isn't it reasonable for me to expect you to invest my money in my own company? If nothing else, all you had to do was to deposit it in a bank--at least it would have drawn some interest.

28. Your attitude makes it impossible for me to trust you with anything. So let me have my money back. I'll give it to those who believe in the future of my company.

29. Anyone who knows how to manage money will invest it where he can get the best returns. But those who aren't even willing to put it into my bank will have to give an account of what I expect of them.

30. I'll have to let you go. I'm sorry

about this, but to keep you on would only hurt the company."

31. Now when the Son of God comes in all His glory and the angels with Him, He'll have to assume His role as Judge and take His seat as King.

32. Everyone who claims to have been loyal will have to be evaluated, and He will have to separate those who are genuine from those who only pretended, as a shepherd has to separate the sheep from the goats during shearing time.

33. The sheep will be called over to His right and the goats to His left.

34. Then as Judge and King He will say to those on His right, 'You are my Father's children because you are so much like Him. Come! Now is the time for you to be given a permanent home in His kingdom which He has been looking forward to giving you for quite some time.'

35. Everyone could see the change that took place in your life when you decided to become one of God's children, because you cared about others as you would care about me. When others were thirsty, you gave them water. When they were hungry, you gave them food, and when they were lost and homeless, you took them in.

36. When they had nothing suitable to wear, you gave them clothes. When they were sick, you visited them and comforted them, and when they were put in jail, you didn't forget them.'

37. Then they will say, 'Lord, we never realized that when we fed the hungry we were feeding you! Or, when we gave thirsty people a drink that we were giving it to you!'

38. Neither did we realize that when we took those who were homeless into our house, we were taking you in! Nor did we realize that when we gave people clean clothes, we were giving them to you!

39. And we didn't know that when we visited and comforted the sick, we were visiting and comforting you or when we stood by those in prison that we were standing by you!'

40. And the Son of God will say, 'I know you didn't realize this because a transformation had taken place in your life and

kindness and compassion became a permanent part of your nature. What you so caringly did even to those who are thought the least of, you did for me.'

41. Then He will say to those on His left, 'I'm sorry, but you can't be given a permanent home in my Father's kingdom. You haven't been transformed, so your nature has essentially the same sinful and selfish potential that Satan's nature has. To let you live forever in this condition would be the worst thing I could do for you.

42. When I was hungry, you didn't offer me anything to eat, or when I was thirsty, you didn't offer me a drink.

43. When I was homeless, you didn't offer me a place to sleep, and when I needed some clothes, you didn't care, and when I sat in jail, you forgot all about me.'

44. They responded, 'Lord, we didn't know that you were ever hungry, thirsty, homeless, in need of clothes, sick, and imprisoned. If we would have known this, we gladly would have helped you!'

45. Then the Son of God will say, 'Because you didn't care, that's why you didn't know. So you're really not interested in what you can do for me, except what I can do for you.

46. In my Father's kingdom everyone cares about everyone else, so I have no choice but to end your life forever.'"

CHAPTER 26

1. **When** Jesus finished telling His disciples what the kingdom of heaven was all about, He said to them,

2. "Two days from now the Passover begins, and the Son of God will be sold into the hands of the priests who will turn Him over to the Romans for crucifixion."

3. In the meanwhile, Caiaphas, the High Priest, had called together the priests, the scribes, and the elders to his palace

4. to help him decide how to arrest Jesus without causing a revolution and then legally convict Him and have Him executed.

5. Those assembled said, "Whatever we do, let's not do it on a religious holiday, especially on the Passover, or we'll really have a revolt on our hands."

6. Now Jesus had been invited to the home of Simon whom He some time ago had healed of leprosy.

7. While all the guests were eating, a prostitute whom Jesus had forgiven and healed came in. She had in her hand a small container of very expensive perfume and went over to Jesus and opened it up and began sprinkling it on His head, arms, and feet.

8. His disciples were watching and saw that Jesus was making no attempt to stop her. They became terribly upset and repeated to each other what Judas kept whispering, "What a waste of money!

9. This perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor!"

10. Jesus knew what was being whispered around. So He said to them, "The reason I'm not stopping her is that she's doing this because she's afraid I'll soon be dead and buried, even though she's hoping I'll be crowned king.

11. You will always have the poor to take care of, but I'll be with you only a few more days.

12. She seems to sense this and has decided to express her appreciation while I'm still alive.

13. This act will always be part of the gospel story wherever it will be preached, because it is an expression of her gratitude for forgiveness and healing."

14. Right after this, Judas left to go to the priests to make a bargain with them to sell Jesus for money.

15. Judas asked the priests, "How much will you give me if I tell you where you can find Jesus and how you can arrest Him without causing an uproar?" They agreed on thirty pieces of silver, which is the price of a slave.

16. From that point on Judas stayed in constant contact with the priests to let them know Jesus' whereabouts.

17. Now that particular year the long Passover weekend started on Thursday evening. Two of the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Tell us where you want to eat this Passover meal, so we can start preparing for it."

18. Jesus said to them, "Go to a certain man in the city and say to him, 'The

Master's time has come, so He was wondering whether He could eat His last Passover meal with His disciples in one of your spare rooms."

19. The disciples did as Jesus said; they got permission to use the upstairs room and prepared for the Passover.

20. When the evening came, Jesus and the other disciples arrived at the place, and soon they were all seated and ready to eat.

21. As they were eating together, Jesus said to them, "Only a few more hours now, then one of you will tell the priests that this is the time to arrest me."

22. The disciples couldn't believe their ears. Each one of them in turn asked, "Lord, you're not talking about me, are you?"

23. After they had all asked, He said, "The one who will dip his bread in his sauce dish at the same time I do sometime during the evening is the one who will betray me.

24. Now all of this my Father knew ahead of time, and the prophets predicted it. Yet the one who is betraying me is not being forced to do it; he's doing it of his own free will. In one way, it would have been better had he not been born because he's only causing his own destruction."

25. By now Judas, who was sitting next to Jesus, was sure that He knew about the bargain made with the priests. Yet to make sure, Judas leaned over to Jesus and quietly asked, "Master, are you referring to me?" Jesus looked at him and whispered back, "Yes, I am."

26. As He spoke, He reached over and took one of the loaves of bread and said the Passover blessing. He then broke the loaf into twelve pieces, one piece for each of the disciples. Then He said, "Take this bread and let's eat it together because it symbolizes what I'm going to do for you. I want you to think of it as my body."

27. Next He reached over and took one of the cups that was full of grape juice. Again He offered the Passover prayer of thanksgiving and said, "I want each of you to take a drink out of this one cup.

28. This unfermented juice symbolizes my blood and together with the bread

represents the fulfilment of my Father's promise that I would come and die for the sins of the world.

29. And I promise that I will not take another drink of grape juice until we meet again and sit down together in heaven to celebrate the end of the reign of sin and the victory of grace."

30. Then Jesus started singing a hymn, and they all joined in and sang it together.

31. Before they left the upstairs room, Jesus said to them, "When they come to arrest me tonight, every one of you will leave me. And this too is according to prophecy, for Zechariah has said, 'The Shepherd will be smitten and all the sheep will flee.'

32. But, as I have told you, on the third day after I die, I will rise again and meet you in Galilee."

33. Peter, being quite disturbed by what he heard, said, "Everyone else may leave you, but I won't!"

34. Jesus looked at Peter and said, "Before tonight is over and the cock crows to welcome the morning, three times you will have denied knowing me."

35. Peter responded, "I'll die before I deny knowing you!" And all the other disciples expressed their loyalty, too, saying the same thing as Peter.

36. **Then** they left the house, and Jesus led the way to the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives. When they got there, Jesus said, "Make yourselves comfortable and wait here. I'm going to my usual place to pray."

37. However, He did take Peter, James, and John with Him. By the time they were out of sight of the others and Jesus had found His prayer spot, He was so depressed and felt so weak that they had to support Him.

38. He turned to the three disciples with Him and said, "My emotions are in a real turmoil. Somehow I feel very weak, as though I'm dying. Would you please stay here and pray for me?"

39. He went just a few steps farther and fell to the ground and in agony of spirit prayed, "O my Father, please don't let me go through this! Already I can feel the sins of the world separating me from you, and

it's awful! But, Father, nevertheless, what's important is not what I want, but what you want."

40. Then He struggled to His feet and walked over to the three disciples and found them already sleeping. He nudged Peter awake and quietly said, "You mean you couldn't stay awake for even a little while to pray for me?"

41. You need to pray for God to strengthen you that you might be able to cope with the temptations you'll be facing before morning comes. I know how it is. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

42. Then Jesus felt another wave of depression come over Him. He went back to the prayer spot, and falling to the ground, said, "O my Father, this cup of suffering is terrible! I can't seem to shake this depression and feel happy about doing what you want me to do. But if there is no other way, then please make your will my will!"

43. Again Jesus struggled to His feet and came back to His three disciples just for some human encouragement, but He found them all sound asleep.

44. For the third time He was driven back to His prayer spot. He fell to the ground trying to overcome a renewed surge of depression. Again He prayed the same prayer.

45. This time His depression left Him and He felt His sinking spirits being lifted. Then He came back to the three disciples and looking at them, He quietly said, "You can sleep now, for it's all over. Yes, the betrayal is complete, and the authorities are already in the garden looking for me." But the disciples didn't hear Him.

46. So He woke them and said, "Come, get up! My betrayer is here with the priests and the Temple guards to arrest me. Let's go to meet them."

47. While Jesus was still trying to get the three disciples up and on their feet, Judas discovered them and came over to them. Following Judas came the priests, the elders, the Temple guards, and a mob carrying knives and clubs.

48. A little while before this Judas had gone to the priests and said to them, "Now is the time to arrest Him. He's in the

Garden of Gethsemane near the Mount of Olives just outside the city. When we get to the garden, it will be dark and you won't know which one He is because His disciples will be there, too. Now the first one I greet and give a brotherly hug and kiss is the man you want. Grab Him quickly and hold on to Him because, even though He's only a little taller than an average man, He's very powerful."

49. So now the time had come and true to his word, Judas walked up to Jesus and said, "Hello, Master!" and then stepped over and gave Him a brotherly hug and kiss.

50. Jesus looked at him and said, "Why are you here, friend?" Then Judas stepped back, and the Temple guards lunged at Jesus and held Him as tightly as they could.

51. When Peter saw this, he became furious. Pulling out his short sword from his belt, he swung it at the High Priest's servant. The guard saw the blade coming and turned his head sideways just in time, but Peter's sword clipped off his ear.

52. Then Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Stop! Don't fight! Put your sword away! Anyone who makes his way by fighting will die fighting.

53. If I had decided to fight my way out of this, I could have asked for twelve legions of angels, and they gladly would have come to help me.

54. But if I did that, then how could the Scriptures be fulfilled?"

55. The guards just stood there and listened. So Jesus freed Himself from their hold, reached out and touched the side of the wounded man's head. Instantly he had a whole new ear! Then Jesus turned to the priests and said, "Why did you come out here with knives and clubs? Why are you acting as if I'm a common criminal? Were you expecting me to fight back? This whole week I sat quietly in the Temple teaching the people; why didn't you arrest me then? Are you carrying out some political plot against me?"

56. Yet it has to happen this way in order for the prophecies to be fulfilled."

57. **When** the disciples heard this, they all fled, just as Jesus had said they would.

58. Then Temple guards took hold of

Jesus and marched Him out of the garden back into the city to the palace of Caiaphas the High Priest. Some of the members of the Jewish High Court had been personally asked to come out in the middle of the night to try Jesus. Now this was against the law because all cases must be tried in the daytime.

59. All this was done in such a hurry that they were still trying to collect witnesses to testify against Jesus so they could convict Him before daybreak and then have Him executed.

60. A number of people volunteered to be witnesses just to help out the High Priest, but none of them gave sufficient evidence for a conviction. Finally, Caiaphas decided to pay two people to give a false testimony.

61. After one of them was sworn in, he said, "I heard this man say, 'If anyone destroys God's Temple, I can build it again in three days.'"

62. Then the High Priest stood up and said to Jesus, "What do you have to say to that? Answer me!"

63. But Jesus said nothing. Then the High Priest demanded an answer and said, "I command you by the living God that you tell us the truth, whether or not you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

64. At this point Jesus felt that He should make a public statement about who He was so it could be recorded. So He answered and said, "What you have just said about me is correct. And one day you will see me coming in the clouds of heaven, sitting on the right hand of God, having been given back full power and authority."

65. Then the High Priest took hold of his outer robe and ripped it in two as a sign of grief and said, "This is blasphemy! What other evidence do we need? We don't need any more witnesses. This man has condemned Himself! He has just claimed to be equal with God, and we all heard His words for ourselves.

66. So what do you think? Do we have to carry on this trial any longer or not?" They all agreed, saying, "He's guilty. Let Him die."

67. Then the mob that had pushed into

the courtroom crowded around Jesus. Some spit in His face, others slapped Him, still others shoved Him, hoping to knock Him down.

68. Some approached Him and shouted in His face, "Prophecy, you Christ! Can you tell which one of us just hit you?"

69. Now, while all this was going on, Peter was sitting around a fire in the courtyard trying to warm himself. A young girl came up to him and said, "Aren't you one of the disciples of Jesus, the Galilean?"

70. Peter denied that he was and spoke up so everyone could hear, "I don't know what you're talking about!"

71. And as he got up and started walking toward the gate, another young girl came up to him and said to those standing around the fire, "I know that man. He's one of the followers of Jesus, the Nazarene!"

72. Peter turned around and again denied that he knew Jesus.

73. A little while later, as he was leaning up against the wall near the gate just on the edge of the group of people gathered around the fire, someone turned, walked over to him, and said, "There's no doubt that you're one of them because your accent and clean talk gives you away."

74. Then Peter began to curse and swear to show that the man was wrong and said to him, "I told you! I don't know the Man!" And just as he finished, the cock crowed.

75. Instantly Peter remembered what Jesus had told him a few hours before when He had said to him, "Before the cock crows in the morning, you will have denied knowing me three times, no matter how much loyalty you profess to have now." Shocked at what he had just done, Peter rushed out of the gate and ran all the way to the Garden of Gethsemane. Finding the same prayer spot, he fell down to the ground, confessed his sin, and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER 27

1. **Now** at the first break of dawn, all the priests and elders were called for the official meeting of the High Court. Those who had been present during the night

were asked to verify the unofficial verdict that Jesus should be executed for blasphemy. Some, like Nicodemus, objected, saying that the way it was done was illegal. But the majority agreed and confirmed the verdict.

2. So they took Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor, to have him approve their decision because the Jews had no authority to take anyone's life.

3. When Judas saw what was happening and that Jesus was not using His power to free Himself and establish His authority as he had hoped He would, he went to see the High Priest, held out the thirty pieces of silver to him and said,

4. "I'm the criminal! I've done a terrible thing! Here, take this back! I broke the law because I lied and sent an innocent person to death! Let Him go! He's not guilty of rebellion!" But Caiaphas said to him, "That's your problem. Get out!"

5. Then Judas threw the money down in front of Caiaphas and went out and hanged himself.

6. The priests picked up the money and said, "We can't put this money in the offering because it's blood money. What should we do with it?"

7. So they decided to use it to buy an old potter's field in which to bury strangers.

8. That's why it's called the Cemetery of Blood.

9. Now all this was in harmony with Jeremiah's prediction when he said, "They will take thirty pieces of silver for Him, an arbitrary value which they themselves will set.

10. And then with it they will buy an old potter's field to use to bury strangers. This will happen just as the Lord says."

11. It was still early in the morning when the priests arrived at Pilate's palace with Jesus. As He stood before the Roman governor, Pilate asked Him, "Are you the rightful King of the Jews?" Jesus answered and said, "That's correct."

12. But, when the priests and elders standing nearby heard it, they cursed Him and denounced His claim. Jesus said nothing.

13. Pilate looked at Jesus and said,

"Don't you hear what they're saying about you?"

14. But Jesus still said nothing, which made Pilate marvel at this Man's self-control.

15. Now it was the custom at the Passover feast for the Roman governor to release for the Jews a political prisoner of their choice.

16. So Pilate brought out the most notorious prisoner he had to appease the people. The one he brought out was a self-styled savior named Jesus Barabbas.

17. After he had quieted the crowd, he asked them, "Which prisoner should I release to you? Jesus Barabbas? Or, Jesus, the Messiah?"

18. Pilate referred to Jesus as the Messiah because he knew that it was over a religious question that they wanted Jesus executed.

19. Then Pilate took his seat as judge and waited while the opinion of the crowd swayed back and forth. Just then a messenger came up and handed him a note from his wife which read, "Don't have anything to do with the conviction of the Jesus who the Jews are bringing to you. I had a very disturbing dream about Him, and I've been terribly upset over it ever since you left."

20. By this time the priests and elders had persuaded the crowd to ask for the release of Barabbas and shouted for the execution of Jesus. They had told the people that Barabbas was pro-Israel and that Jesus was not.

21. Then Pilate again stood up and asked the crowd, "Which of these two should I let go?" And the crowd shouted back, "Barabbas!"

22. "What do you want me to do with Jesus?" Pilate asked. The crowd shouted back, "Crucify Him!"

23. "Why?" asked Pilate, "He has committed no crime!" But the crowd shouted louder than ever, "Crucify Him!"

24. When Pilate saw the mood of the crowd, rather than releasing Jesus and causing a riot, which would then be reported to Rome, he decided to wash his hands of the whole matter, thinking that in so doing he was following his wife's sug-

gestion. So he had a basin brought and washed his hands for the crowd to see and said, "I am innocent of this Man's blood. Do with Him what you want."

25. Then the crowd roared back, "Let His blood be on us and on our children!"

26. So the governor let Barabbas go and ordered Jesus to be scourged before he let them take Him out for crucifixion.

27. Then the Roman soldiers took Him down to the courtyard and called out the whole palace guard to watch the sport.

28. First, they stripped Him naked. Then they put an old royal robe over His shoulders.

29. Next, they got a branch from a thorn bush and twisted it into a crown and pushed it down into His skull so it would stay there. Then they got a stick and forced Him to hold it like a scepter, and to climax it all, they knelt down in front of Him and laughed and said, "Honor to you, O King of the Jews."

30. When each soldier got up off his knees, he spit in Jesus' face, and some took the stick out of His hand and beat Him on His head.

31. After they had their fun, they took off the robe, tied Him to the whipping post, and scourged Him as Pilate had ordered until His back was ripped to shreds. Then they untied Him, put His own robe back on Him, laid the heavy crossbeam on His shoulder, and led Him out of the courtyard and through the city for crucifixion.

32. But, because of the scourging and the lack of food and water, Jesus had no strength left to carry that heavy crossbeam. The soldiers looked around and in the crowd saw a man named Simon who was originally from Cyrene, in Africa, and who was expressing his sympathy for Jesus. The soldiers grabbed him and ordered him to carry the crossbeam, which he gladly did.

33. Finally they reached the place of execution, which is a little hill just outside the city and is called Golgotha, meaning the skull.

34. There they offered Jesus a vinegar-like drink mixed with drugs to help kill the pain. But after He tasted it, as thirsty

as He was, He spit it out.

35. Then to the surprise of the soldiers, He willingly lay down on the cross which was lying there in front of Him. So they tied His arms to the crossbeam, nailed His hands and feet down, and then hoisted the cross in place, letting it slip to the bottom of the hole with a thud. When this was done the soldiers sat down and started gambling for His seamless robe which had been made as a gift to Him. All this was prophesied by David when he wrote, "They will divide my garments among them and will gamble for my robe."

36. After the soldiers had divided His belongings and gambled for His robe, they sat down to watch Him die.

37. High on the cross over Jesus' head, they had put the sign ordered by Pilate which said, "This is Jesus, King of the Jews."

38. Two criminals who had been followers of Barabbas were crucified with Jesus. One was on His right and the other on His left.

39. As the custom was for these executions, people came from everywhere to show their hatred of criminals by standing in front of them and cursing them. When they came to Jesus, they wagged their heads and said,

40. "Aren't you the one who said that, if anyone destroys God's Temple, you could build it again in three days? Show us what you can do to save yourself! If you're the Son of God, as you say you are, then come down. Those ropes and nails shouldn't stop you!"

41. Also, the priests together with the scribes and elders made fun of Him, of His illegitimate birth, and of the supposed virginity of His mother. Pointing their fingers at Him, they laughed and said,

42. "This man saved others, but now He can't even save Himself! If He's the real King of Israel as He claims He is, then let Him do one of His miracles and come down from the cross. Then we'll believe Him!"

43. He said He put His whole trust in God, but this is not the God we know! This must be someone else He's trusting in! If it were our God, he'd come and help

Him! How can He say He's the Son of God?"

44. Then the two criminals who were being crucified with Him vented their anger and joined the crowd in making fun of Him and cursing Him.

45. Now, about noon, it suddenly started to get dark, and soon heavy clouds covered not only the place of crucifixion but also the whole area. It was so dark that people had to feel their way back to the city. Everyone became quiet and sensed that this was some supernatural phenomenon that they could not explain. Even the soldiers became uneasy. And this unnatural darkness lasted until three o'clock in the afternoon.

46. It was at about this time that Jesus cried out so that everyone who was still there could hear, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthai?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

47. Those who stood by heard what He said but thought He was asking Elijah to come to help Him.

48. Someone standing nearby, wanting to be helpful, ran to get a sponge, soaked it with the same vinegar-like drink they had offered Jesus earlier that morning, put the sponge on a long stick, and was ready to offer it to Him.

49. But the rest who were still there stopped him and said, "No, wait! Let's first see if Elijah will come to help Him."

50. Then suddenly Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "It's finished!" and bowed His head and died.

51. At that same instant, the curtain of the Temple separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was ripped in half from top to bottom. Then an earthquake struck, the ground shook, and rocks split off the mountains.

52. The graves of some of the saints of old opened up, exposing their remains.

53. When Jesus rose from the grave, these saints arose with Him and went into the city as living witnesses of the power of the resurrection.

54. Back at the cross, the Roman soldiers who had been watching Jesus knew that something unusual was going on, because the earthquake struck right after

Jesus cried out, bowed His head, and died. The people, too, were afraid and said to themselves, "He must have been the Son of God!"

55. Many of the women who had followed Jesus throughout His ministry and cared for Him and His disciples were still at the scene, but they stood some distance away.

56. One of the women was Mary Magdalene, the prostitute, whom Jesus had forgiven. Also Mary, the mother of James the Younger and of Joseph, was at the cross, as was Salome, the mother of the Zebedee brothers.

57. By now it was late in the afternoon and time to get ready for the Sabbath. Joseph of Arimathea, who was a member of the Jewish High Court, and Nicodemus were staying by. Until now they had been secret followers of Jesus.

58. These two went now boldly to Pilate, the Roman governor, and asked permission to take Jesus' body down from the cross and bury it in Joseph's new tomb.

59. Pilate granted their request. So Joseph, together with some of the disciples, took down the body, wrapped it in a white linen sheet,

60. carried it over to Joseph's tomb, which was nearby, and laid it inside on the stone slab where the dead are to be laid. Then they rolled a huge boulder in front of the tomb and left for home to keep the Sabbath.

61. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James the Younger, stayed for a little while longer.

62. The next day, which was the Sabbath, right after the sun had set, the priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate and said,

63. "Sir, we remember that this Man Jesus, when He was still alive, predicted that after three days (using Jewish figuring) He would rise again.

64. We would like to request that you place a Roman guard at the gravesite just for tonight and tomorrow until the time He predicted He would rise has passed. We think His disciples might come during the night and steal His body so that they can tell the people that His prediction was right and that He rose from the dead. If

this happened, our people would be worse off than before He died."

65. Pilate agreed, sent a detachment of Roman guards with them, and suggested that they make the tomb as secure from robbers as they could.

66. So the priests went to the gravesite, made sure the entrance to the tomb was still closed, then poured some hot wax on one place where the edge of the stone touched the tomb to seal it so no one would dare to roll it away. They cautioned the Roman guards to stay alert because they could expect some grave robbers to come during the night to try to steal the body.

CHAPTER 28

1. **When** the Sabbath was past and the night of the first day was almost over, just as it began to dawn early on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James the Younger, headed back to the gravesite. They were hoping that someone would roll away the stone so they could get in and prepare the body better.

2. While the women were on their way, another earthquake struck the area. This happened because Gabriel, the angel of God, had come down from heaven, rolled away the huge stone as if it were a pebble, and announced the resurrection of Jesus. Then he sat on the stone and waited for the women.

3. His face was as bright as lightning, and his robe glistened like freshly fallen snow.

4. The Roman soldiers froze in their tracks because of what they saw, then started shaking uncontrollably with fright, and finally ran to see Pilate.

5. When the women came, Gabriel, taking on the guise of humanity, said, "Don't be afraid. I know that you love Jesus, the One who was crucified, and you came here to honor His body.

6. But the good news is that He is not here. He's risen! Come, see for yourselves that the place where His body was is now empty.

7. Now quickly go and tell the good news to His disciples. Tell them that Jesus has risen from the dead, just as He pre-

dicted and that He'll meet them in Galilee just as He promised He would."

8. Then the women fled with mixed emotions of fright and joy, to tell the disciples the good news.

9. On the way into the city Jesus met them and said, "Good morning!" The women couldn't believe their eyes. They fell on their knees, put their arms around His feet, and worshiped Him.

10. Jesus spoke to them, "You don't have to be afraid anymore. Go and tell my disciples that they should go up to the Lake of Galilee and I'll meet them there."

11. While this was taking place, some of the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb ran ahead to the chief priests and told them everything that had happened.

12. The priests called together some of the elders and, after carefully discussing the matter, decided to pay the soldiers off and to ask them to tell a different story.

13. They told them to go and get the other guardsmen. When they were all together, the priests and the elders said to the soldiers, "Don't tell people that Jesus rose from the dead, but rather, that during the night you fell asleep and His disciples came and stole the body.

14. If the governor hears that you fell asleep while on duty, we'll stand up for you and talk to him about it to make sure he overlooks the whole thing."

15. So the soldiers accepted the payoff and agreed to say that Jesus' body was stolen. This false report is still circulating.

16. In the meanwhile, the eleven disciples went up into Galilee to meet Jesus.

17. And when they met Him, they fell on their knees and worshiped Him. Still, some doubted that this could all be true.

18. Jesus spent a number of days with the disciples. Then before He left, He said, "All power over things in heaven and in earth has now been returned to me.

19. So go and tell all nations the good news and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

20. Teach them everything I've taught you. I'll never leave you alone; I'll always be with you, even unto the end of the world." Amen.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

CHAPTER 1

1. **The** good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, began this way.

2. The ancient prophets who spoke for God said, "Behold I'm sending you a special messenger to prepare the way for me before I come to you.

3. He'll preach with a strong voice and will make his home in the Judean wilderness. His message will be: Get ready! The Lord is coming! So welcome Him by turning away from your sins!"

4. When John the Baptist arrived, he did just that; he made his home in the wilderness and preached a message of repentance. He also baptized people as a sign of a changed life.

5. Seemingly, the whole country went out to the wilderness to see him, especially the people from Jerusalem. Day after day they would go to listen. Many people confessed their sins and were baptized by John in the Jordan River.

6. Now, John looked like one of the ancient prophets. He was dressed in a skin of camel hair with a strip of leather around his waist for a belt, and he ate only locust fruit and wild honey.

7. He preached these words: "Someone is soon to come who is mightier than any of the ancient prophets. He is coming with a message even more important than mine. In fact, I don't consider myself worthy to tie His shoes.

8. I only baptize with water, but He will baptize people with the Holy Spirit!"

9. It was during this time that Jesus left Nazareth, which is in the province of Galilee, and made His way down to Judea to the Jordan river where John was. He too was baptized.

10. When He came up out of the water, He saw what seemed like an opening right into heaven and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove coming down.

11. This was followed by a voice from heaven saying, "You are my only begotten Son. And I'm pleased with what you've just done."

12. From here Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit to a most desolate place in the wil-

derness to fast, to pray, and to prepare for His mission.

13. **He** was there for forty days surrounded by all kinds of wild animals. He was severely tempted by the devil to use His divine powers selfishly. When it was all over, He was so exhausted that angels from heaven came to revive His dying body and give Him strength to begin His ministry.

14. Soon afterward John was arrested and put into prison for telling Herod that his adulterous relationship with his half-brother's wife was wrong. It was about that time that Jesus went back to Galilee preaching the good news of the kingdom of God.

15. He would tell the people: "The time has come! The kingdom of God is here! Repent! Believe the good news that I'm telling you and your lives will be changed!"

16. Now one day as Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, He stopped and watched Peter and his brother Andrew skillfully throwing a large fishing net into the sea as professional fishermen do.

17. Then He called out to them, "Come with me! I'll teach you how to fish for men!"

18. And without hesitation they left their nets and their fellow fishermen and followed Him.

19. Jesus, still walking near the shore, saw James and his brother John, who were known as the Zebedee brothers, sitting in their father's boat mending nets.

20. Jesus called out to them as He had to the other two brothers, and immediately they got up and left their father and the other workers sitting in the boat and followed Him.

21. Together the five walked to the nearby town of Capernaum where, the next Sabbath, Jesus attended the local synagogue. As a small group of people gathered, He began to teach them.

22. The people were amazed at His teaching, both at what He said and at His style, because He didn't teach as the scribes, who were never exactly certain what the Scriptures meant.

23. This particular Sabbath there was a man present who was demon possessed. He stood up and shouted,

24. "Leave us alone! What do we have to do with you? You're Jesus from Nazareth, aren't you? Have you come to punish us? I know who you are! You're the Holy One of Israel!"

25. Jesus interrupted him and said to the demon, "Stop shouting and come out of this man!"

26. Immediately the demon threw the man down into convulsions and then with a shriek came out of him.

27. Everyone was awestruck by what they saw and said to each other, "We've never seen anything like this before! What kind of new teacher is this? The kind of authority this Man has is amazing! He tells the demons what to do, and they do it!"

28. Instantly, the news of what Jesus had done spread throughout Galilee, and He became famous overnight.

29. **After** the services, Jesus and His four disciples went to Peter's house for a bite to eat.

30. But when they arrived, they found Peter's mother-in-law sick in bed with a high fever.

31. Jesus went into the room where she was resting, took her hand, and asked her to sit up. Immediately the fever left her. She got up, dressed, took some bread and fish, and prepared them a meal.

32. After sunset, when the Sabbath was over, the townspeople brought all the sick, even those who were thought to be demon possessed, to Jesus to be healed.

33. Seemingly the whole town gathered outside of Peter's house.

34. That evening Jesus healed many people of all kinds of diseases and cast out demons from many of them, telling the demons to come out quietly, which they did.

35. Then early the next morning, a long while before daybreak, Jesus left Peter's house and went out of town, up into the hills to a secluded place to talk with His Father.

36. When daylight came, Peter and the other three disciples went looking for Him.

37. When they found Him, they said, "People are already at the house waiting to see you!"

38. Jesus said to them, "Let's not go back. Let's go to the next town so I can help those people, too, and teach them as I did the people here. I have to spread the good news as far and wide as I can."

39. He did just that, going throughout Galilee preaching in the local synagogues, healing the sick, and casting out demons.

40. Near one town a leper came to Jesus. He knelt down in front of Him and said, "I know that if you really want to heal me you can!"

41. Jesus was moved with compassion as He saw the man. Then He reached out and touched him and said, "Of course I want you to be clean! Go now! You're healed!"

42. Instantly the leprosy was gone, and the man was healed.

43. Then, before He left, Jesus spoke earnestly to him saying,

44. "Now don't tell anyone how you were healed before you go to the priests. Let them see you first and pronounce you clean, then carefully carry out the ritual which Moses gave to lepers after they were well again. This will let everyone know that you're healed and are allowed to go home and live in the community."

45. But the man didn't listen. He thought that Jesus was just being modest. So he told everyone he met how Jesus had healed him. This greatly upset the priests, especially since the man hadn't even carried out the prescribed ritual. That's why Jesus decided to leave town, because He knew He would be accused of breaking the law and spreading disease. So He left the city and went to an isolated area in the country. Before long, however, the people found Him there and once again they flocked to see Him.

CHAPTER 2

1. **Sometime** later Jesus returned to Capernaum and the people soon found out that He was back and where He was staying.

2. Within a few hours so many came to see Him that the house He was staying

in was soon full. The hallways were jammed with people, and outside they crowded around the open windows to hear what Jesus was saying.

3. Now four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher, hoping to see Jesus and ask Him to heal their friend.

4. But because of the crowd, they couldn't get near the place. Someone suggested they climb up on the flat roof, lift off some of the roofing material, and lower the man down right in front of Jesus. And that's what they did.

5. When Jesus looked up to see what was happening, He admired their determination to have their friend healed. When the stretcher was finally lowered, Jesus looked at the man and said, "Son, don't worry. I forgive you your sins."

6. When some of the scribes and Pharisees heard Him say that, they thought to themselves,

7. "Who does He think He is, claiming to forgive sins! No human being can do that! Only God can! That's blasphemy!"

8. Jesus knew what they were thinking. He turned to them and said, "Why are you thinking as you are?"

9. You think that I've committed blasphemy and that I've given this man a false hope. Let me ask you which takes more power, to forgive sins or to heal a paralyzed body?

10. To help you understand that I have power to forgive sins, I will first show you that I have power to heal. "He then turned to the paralyzed man and said,

11. "Get up, pick up your stretcher, and go home."

12. Instantly the man's body responded. He sat up, stood on his feet, reached down, folded up his stretcher, picked it up, made his way through the crowd, and walked home praising the Lord. The people were dumfounded and said, "Never have we seen anything like this before!"

13. Then Jesus left the house and made His way down to the lake with crowds of people trailing behind Him. His plan was to continue His teaching once He got there.

14. On the way He passed a public tax booth and saw Levi Matthew sitting and collecting taxes. Jesus stopped, looked at

Matthew, and said, "Come and follow me." Matthew got up, asked his assistant to take over, and followed Him.

15. Later Jesus accepted Matthew's invitation to dinner. In addition to the disciples, many others had been invited who would be considered outcasts and sinners by the Jewish authorities.

16. When the scribes and Pharisees saw that Jesus had accepted the invitation and did not hesitate to eat with such people, they came to Matthew's house and asked the disciples, "How can your Master eat with people like these when He knows that some of them are collaborating with the Romans to tax us, and others are living in open sin?"

17. When Jesus overheard their conversation, He said to them, "People who are well don't need a physician, only people who are sick. There is no need to help people who are well, but I go to those people who need me so I can help them change their lives."

18. Now John the Baptist's disciples fasted weekly, just as the Pharisees did. They also came to Matthew's house to see Jesus and asked Him, "Why don't your disciples fast weekly as we and the Pharisees do?"

19. Jesus answered them saying, "Do you think members of a wedding party should fast when they're sitting at the same table with the bridegroom? That wouldn't be right, would it?"

20. But the time comes when the bridegroom leaves, when the wedding party is over, and then there will be plenty of time to fast.

21. You can't take a new piece of cloth and sew it on a rotting pair of trousers, because the old cloth will not support the new piece very long, and soon the hole will be bigger than before.

22. You know that no one pours fresh grape juice into old cracked wineskins, because old wineskins can't take the pressure. If someone pushes on them too much, they split open and any juice that's in them is gone. That's why people put fresh juice into new wineskins. That's how it is in life. The times call for changes from what you're used to."

23. **Sometime** later, on a Sabbath morning, Jesus and His disciples were walking past a wheat field on their way to worship. Since they hadn't had breakfast, they broke off some heads of wheat, took the kernels, and ate them.

24. Some of the Pharisees, also going to the synagogue, noticed from a distance what the disciples were doing. When they came up to Jesus, they said, "Can't you see what your disciples are doing? They're harvesting on the Sabbath! And that's against the law!"

25. Jesus answered, "Haven't you read in Scripture about David's experience and what he and they that were with him did when they were hungry?"

26. Remember how they went to see Abiathar, the High Priest at the Sanctuary, told him that they were hungry, and he gave them some of the flat loaves of shewbread which was against the law for anyone to eat except the priests?"

27. Then to clarify what He meant, Jesus added, "You see, man was not created to observe the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made to serve man.

28. I'm the Lord of the Sabbath. I know what's right to do on the Sabbath and what isn't."

CHAPTER 3

1. Now when Jesus and His disciples came into the synagogue, they saw a man in the congregation with a shriveled arm.

2. Some in the congregation had come to spy on Jesus, to see whether or not He would heal on the Sabbath so they could accuse Him of breaking the law.

3. In spite of this, when Jesus saw the man's shriveled arm, He motioned to him to come.

4. When the man came, Jesus turned to the congregation and said, "Is it right to heal people on the Sabbath, or isn't it? Which is worse, to do something good on the Sabbath or to think evil? Is it evil to make someone whole on the Sabbath, or is it better to let someone be miserable?" But the congregation just sat there saying nothing.

5. Jesus was upset as He looked around the congregation because not one

of them seemed to know what He was talking about, having had their minds pretty well made up about what should and what shouldn't be done on the Sabbath. So Jesus turned back to the man with the shriveled arm and said, "Stretch out your arm." As the man held up his shriveled arm the best he could, it suddenly straightened and became just like the other one.

6. Immediately the Pharisees left the church and went to confer with the Herodians about how they would get rid of Jesus.

7. When the service was over, Jesus and His disciples left and went down to the lake. Huge crowds followed, not only people from Galilee, Judea,

8. and Jerusalem, but also people from Idumea, from the other side of the Jordan river, and from as far away as Tyre and Sidon. They had heard all about what Jesus was doing.

9. At the lake, Jesus asked the disciples to get one of their boats ready just in case He needed it, for there were many people and He was almost crowded off the beach and into the water.

10. Jesus healed a large number of people that day, and soon the crowd was pushing in on Him just to be able to touch Him, especially those who had severe ailments for they were the most eager to be healed.

11. The people who were demon possessed came and fell down in front of Jesus shouting, "Yes, you are the Son of God! You are! You are!"

12. Jesus commanded the spirits to stop shouting because this could bring on a public disturbance if the people began to argue over who He was rather than to listen to what He had to say.

13. **Later** that day Jesus made His way up one of the hillsides with His disciples whom He had called to follow Him. When they were all with Him,

14. He ordained them, setting them apart to work with Him in preaching the good news of the kingdom.

15. He also gave them power to heal the sick and to cast out demons.

16. Simon, whom He had renamed

Peter, was ordained,

17. also James and his brother John, the Zebedee brothers, whom Jesus called the Sons of Thunder.

18. The others were Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon, a patriot from Cana,

19. and Judas Iscariot, who later turned Jesus over to the authorities for thirty pieces of silver. After the ordination, they accepted an invitation for dinner.

20. As soon as they arrived, people began crowding around the house and pushing their way into it, trying to see Jesus. He and His disciples didn't even have time to finish eating.

21. During this time, Jesus' relatives heard what He was doing and tried to contact Him, hoping to convince Him to return home. They thought He had lost His mind to challenge the Pharisees and to claim that He was Lord of the Sabbath. They also thought that the crowds were following Him just to see the spectacle He was making of Himself.

22. Teachers from Jerusalem were accusing Him of being devil possessed and even of being controlled by Beelzebub, the devil himself, and through his power casting out the other demons.

23. To this group Jesus turned and asked, "How can Satan cast out other demons and expect his kingdom to survive?"

24. A kingdom divided within itself won't last.

25. A family that's divided won't last either.

26. So, if Satan turns against his own demons, he can't possibly survive, and eventually he'll lose his own kingdom.

27. You know that no one can break into another man's house to rob him without first subduing him and tying him up. Then he'll be free to rob the house and take what he wants. So before anyone can take men and women out from Satan's control, he'll have to be greater than Satan. The devil will never let anyone take away one of his victims unless he's first subdued.

28. There is no sin that God cannot forgive, even if a man curses Him.

29. But if a man attributes the work of the Holy Spirit to the power of the devil, then all possibility of forgiveness and spiritual healing is gone, and the only future he can look forward to is to face the consequences of his own sin."

30. Jesus had spoken as He did because the people had accused Him of being devil possessed.

31. Meanwhile, Jesus' mother and step-brothers decided to see Him, but couldn't get near the house where He was teaching and healing because of the crowds of people. So they passed a message in to Him by word of mouth, asking Him to come out.

32. When the ones sitting near Jesus heard the message, they said to Jesus, "Your mother and step-brothers are outside, and they want to see you."

33. Jesus said, "Who are the ones who are really related to me? Who is really a mother and brother to me?"

34. He looked out at the people crowding around Him and said, "You are the ones who are mothers and brothers to me.

35. In fact, anyone who is interested in doing my Father's will as I am, he is my real brother or sister or mother." Then He went out to see His family.

CHAPTER 4

1. **Later** Jesus went down to the lake where all the people could hear Him. The crowds followed Him, and He taught them. In fact, that day there were so many people that this time Jesus got into one of the fishing boats and pushed a little way from shore. The people came right down to the water's edge to hear Him.

2. From where He sat, Jesus taught the people by using parables and said,

3. "Do you see that sower up there on the hillside?"

4. When a man throws out seed with his hands, some seed will fall on the edge of the road, and as you know, the birds are right there to eat it up.

5. Some of the seed falls on rocky patches that don't have much topsoil, and it's the first to pop up because it can't push any farther down to grow the roots as it should.

6. So, after a couple of hot days with no rain, it dries up, because its roots are not down far enough to get any moisture.

7. Other seed falls under sprouting thorns, but the thorns grow faster than the seed and choke it out, and it never does grow enough to bear fruit.

8. But some of the seed does fall on good ground, takes root, grows up healthy, and bears fruit yielding a crop thirty, sixty, or one hundred times more than what was sown.

9. If you have ears to hear, then listen carefully to what I've just said."

10. Later, when Jesus was alone with His disciples, they asked Him what the parable meant.

11. And He said to them, "I'm glad you're asking and that you want to know more about God's kingdom. Now there's a reason why I use parables when I teach the people.

12. One reason is to separate those who really want to know from those who don't. You see the Holy Spirit will help those who really want to know to understand what I'm saying. And those who don't want to know are like people who have eyes but see nothing and have ears but hear nothing. It's as if they're afraid of having their sins forgiven, being converted, and having to change.

13. Yet, I'm a little surprised that you didn't catch the full meaning of this simple parable, and I'm wondering if you don't need some help in understanding some of the other parables too, but for now let me at least explain this one.

14. The sower sowing on the hill represents anyone sowing the good news contained in the Scriptures.

15. Now the edge of the road represents people who are impressed as they hear the good news, but Satan is right there and comes up with all kinds of other side interests to get people involved in and takes away any lasting impression that the good news may have made.

16. The rocky soil represents people who receive the good news gladly and are thrilled with it,

17. but they live on the excitement of the moment and don't think it through

and take it to heart as they should, and when they are called upon to answer for their faith, their experience shrivels up and dies.

18. Then there are those whose experience is represented by the seed that falls under the thorns. They also receive the good news gladly and are thrilled with it,

19. but the responsibilities of life, the attraction of making more money, or the desire to accumulate things to have a good life, create other pressures and soon the good news is pushed into the background and never produces what it was supposed to.

20. However, some people who are impressed by the good news think it through and take it to heart; they commit themselves to it, they grow, and they continue to give it top priority. They bear fruit, some more than others, but they all have a plentiful harvest.

21. Now let me ask you, do people buy a lamp for light and then hide it? Do they buy it for light and then cover it up or hide it under their bed? Don't they place it on a lampstand and hold it up high so people can see by it?

22. Heaven has nothing to hide and the light belongs to everyone. Nor are there any hidden secrets in the good news.

23. All can understand it, if they just open their ears and listen.

24. However, you do need to be careful because the devil will come and mix error with truth. You need to sift what you hear because, if you don't, you can't be offered more truth.

25. So the person who loves the truth will be given greater insight, and the person who doesn't love the truth will lose the insight he has.

26. You see, the good news about the kingdom of God is like a man who sows good seed.

27. Day after day he goes about his other work unconcerned but confident that the seed will sprout and the grain will come up even though he can't explain how it all happens.

28. But he knows that it does happen and that the ground will produce a harvest without depending on him. It first

produces the blade, then the ear, and finally the full-grown corn in the ear.

29. Then, as soon as the corn is ready, he quickly brings out his harvesting equipment to reap what he sowed.

30. To what else can I compare the kingdom of God, to help you understand it better?

31. Well, it's also like a single seed, like a tiny mustard seed, which is one of the most insignificant seeds you can plant.

32. But just look at it after it sprouts and grows. When it's full grown, it's bigger than any other garden plant you have. It even has branches and leaves so that birds think it's a tree and come and nest there."

33. Jesus told the people and His disciples many more parables like these at every opportunity He had and whenever He thought they were ready to listen.

34. In fact, most of the time He taught by using parables. When He was alone with His disciples, He would explain these parables to them.

35. By the end of that particular day at the lake, after Jesus had healed many people and taught them and also explained these parables to His disciples, He said to them, "Let's go across the lake."

36. After Jesus dismissed the people and sent them home, the disciples got into the little fishing boat with Him and pushed off to cross the lake, accompanied by a couple of other little fishing boats.

37. When they were about halfway across, suddenly a gale-force wind swept down the slopes surrounding the lake, whipping up the waves, and within minutes they found themselves in a storm, their boats fast filling up with water.

38. In the midst of all this, Jesus was curled up at one end of the boat, His head resting on a makeshift pillow, peacefully sleeping through it all. Finally the disciples were so desperate that they shook Him awake and said, "Master, wake up! We're in the middle of a storm, and unless it stops, we'll all die! Don't you care what happens to us?"

39. Jesus stood up and knew that the demons were causing the wind to blow so strong. Then He said to the storm, "Peace,

be still." Instantly the wind stopped, the waves died down, and the night was once again peaceful and the waters of the lake calm.

40. He then turned to the disciples and said, "Why were you so scared? Don't you trust God?"

41. And when the disciples saw what had happened, they were awestruck and said to each other, "What kind of power does He have that even the wind and the waves obey Him?"

CHAPTER 5

1. By morning they arrived on the other side of the lake that bordered on the province of Decapolis.

2. As soon as they stepped out of the boats, a madman charged down the hill straight at them. It was clear to everyone that he was devil possessed.

3. He had been living in a nearby cave. The authorities tried to arrest him, but every time they caught him, he would break the chains and escape.

4. Because this had happened so often, the authorities finally gave up and left him alone.

5. So night and day he terrorized people traveling that hillside road, screaming and cutting himself with sharp stones until his whole body was covered with blood.

6. So now he came charging down the hill directly at the disciples who turned and ran, but Jesus stood still. When the man came near Jesus, he suddenly stopped, then fell on his knees as if to worship Him, and then shouted,

7. "What do you want with me? You are Jesus, the Son of the Most High God! In God's name I ask you not to torture me!"

8. Before Jesus cast the demons out, He spoke to them and said,

9. "Tell me your name." And one of the demons answered and said, "I don't have one name, I have many names, because we are many."

10. Then he pleaded with Jesus not to ask them to leave that part of the country.

11. Now in the nearby hills was a large herd of swine.

12. The demon begged Jesus saying, "Please let us go into the pigs and possess them."

13. So Jesus gave them permission, and the demons came out of the man and went into the pigs. Suddenly the poor animals rushed down the hill and into the lake, and all two thousand of them drowned.

14. Then the swine herdsman ran back to town to tell the owner what happened and on the way they told everyone they met what had happened. Soon people flocked in from everywhere to see for themselves who this man was who had done this thing.

15. When they arrived, they saw the madman sitting very close to Jesus, fully dressed, talking intelligently, and participating in the conversation. The people were amazed at what they saw.

16. Now those who had been nearby when Jesus first arrived and saw all this happen also rushed into town and told the people what they saw, including what happened to the large herd of pigs.

17. Then the people from Gadara and the Jewish pig farmers who lived there came out and pleaded with Jesus to leave the area because they did not want Him to hurt with their business.

18. Sadly Jesus complied with their request. He had hoped that His ministry would help them to see that people were more important than money and pigs. But He didn't want to force Himself on them, so He and His disciples headed toward the boats. The healed man begged them to let him go along.

19. But Jesus spoke to him and said, "What I want you to do is to stay here. Go home and tell your friends and neighbors how God had compassion on you and how you were healed."

20. The man did just that, and wherever he went throughout the province of Decapolis, he told people the wonderful thing that Jesus had done for him. And when the people heard it, they were amazed.

21. **Meanwhile**, Jesus and His disciples crossed back over the lake, and as soon as He got to the other side, people came from everywhere to see Him.

22. While He was by the lakeside, one of the local synagogue leaders, Jairus, came and fell on his knees in front of Jesus and begged Him saying,

23. "My little girl has been terribly sick and now she's dying. Please come and put your hands on her and heal her so she can live!"

24. Jesus said that He would go and began following him to his house. A huge crowd went along with them.

25. A woman who had been continually menstruating for the last twelve years was in the crowd.

26. Over the years she had gone to many physicians, using up all her life savings in the process, but without success. And her condition was gradually getting worse.

27. When she had heard about Jesus and how He could heal, she joined the crowd and then gradually pushed her way to the front, telling herself,

28. "If I can only get close enough to Him to reach out and touch Him, even just touch His robe, I know I'll be healed."

29. When she succeeded in touching Him, instantly her bleeding stopped and suddenly she felt so much better that she knew she had been healed.

30. At that same instant Jesus stopped, because He could feel that healing power had gone out of Him. He turned around and said to the people bumping up against Him, "Who touched my robe?"

31. The disciples said, "With all these people bumping up against you, how can you ask such a question?"

32. But Jesus kept looking, and then He spotted the woman who had touched Him hiding in the crowd.

33. The woman was so afraid she was shaking all over. Then she pushed her way through the crowd, fell on her knees, and told Jesus the whole story.

34. Jesus said to her, "Don't be afraid. You're a daughter of Israel, and I care about you as I would my own sister. You're completely healed now and this continuous bleeding won't happen again. So be happy that you're well. Go home and enjoy life."

35. While He was commenting to the crowd about the faith that this woman had,

some other people who had just come from Jairus' house pushed through the crowd and said to him, "Your daughter is dead. So there's no use bothering this Teacher and insisting that He come to the house."

36. When Jesus overheard the news, He said to Jairus, "Don't lose hope. Just have confidence in what I can do for you, just as this woman did."

37. Then He turned to the people and asked them not to follow Him. He also asked the disciples to stay with the people, but He did take Peter, James, and John with Him. Led by Jairus, they went to his house as quickly as they could.

38. The professional mourners had already arrived, as had some of the relatives, and the house was full.

39. Jesus and the disciples had to push their way in. When they came to where the family and the mourners were sitting, He said to them, "Why are you groaning and making all these mournful sounds? The girl isn't dead, she's sleeping."

40. They all laughed. Then He insisted that everyone leave the house and stay outside. When everyone was out, He, the parents, and the three disciples went into the bedroom where the dead girl was.

41. Jesus took the little twelve-year-old girl's hand and quietly said, "Little girl, I want you to get up."

42. Instantly she opened her eyes, sat up, and got out of bed. She looked around and ran to her father and mother who had stopped crying and stood there dumfounded.

43. Then Jesus told the parents to give her something to eat, and not to tell everyone what He had done.

CHAPTER 6

1. **From** Capernaum Jesus, together with His disciples, went to Nazareth where He had been brought up.

2. When the Sabbath came, Jesus went to synagogue, and the people wanted Him to speak to hear what He had to say. So He spoke to them, and they were amazed at what He had to say. They asked each other, "Where did He learn all this? Where did He get such insight? And where does He get this kind of power to work the

miracles that He does?

3. Then as He showed them their needs of salvation, they said, "Isn't this the carpenter boy who is Mary's son? Aren't James, Joseph, Judes, and Simon His step-brothers? And don't we know His step-sisters, too? He's no better than we are! Who does He think He is to come here to teach us?" And they were angry with Him.

4. Jesus overheard their whispered conversations and said, "A preacher of righteousness seems to be respected and listened to everywhere else, except in his own hometown, by his own relatives, and by those he grew up with."

5. So He didn't work many miracles there, except to lay His hands on a few people who had confidence in Him to heal them.

6. He was amazed at the lack of confidence that the people in Nazareth had in Him. So He left to go teach in the other cities and towns.

7. About this time He commissioned the twelve disciples to go out two by two to preach, teach, heal, and if need be, to cast out demons.

8. He told them not to take anything with them except their walking sticks--no food, no beggar's bag, and no money in their belts.

9. He told them to wear sandals, but not to worry about an extra change of clothing.

10. Also He said to them, "If you're invited to stay at someone's house, feel free to stay there as long as they want you to or until you decide to leave town. That will give the townspeople a good impression of you, and it will be easier for them to accept what you have to say.

11. If you go into a town, and the people don't want you to stay, don't force yourself on them. Leave and go to another place. If you need to, shake the dust off your feet so they will know that you are leaving at their request and not because you want to. I feel sorry for those towns and villages that don't want to listen to you. They're rejecting more light than did the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah."

12. So the disciples went out preach-

ing, inviting men and women to repent and to change their ways.

13. They also cast out demons, anointed the sick, and prayed for people to be healed; and God healed them.

14. By now Jesus' fame had spread to the palace, and King Herod heard about His works. He said to himself, "This man Jesus sounds as though He's John the Baptist risen from the dead; that's the reason He can do all these miracles."

15. Others said to him, "It sounds more like He's Elijah." Still others said, "It almost seems like Moses has come back to life or maybe one of the other prophets."

16. But Herod insisted and said, "There is no doubt in my mind that He is John the Baptist, the one I beheaded, and that He is risen from the dead."

17. Now Herod said this because he had arrested John to save his own wife from losing face over their marriage. (She had been married to Herod's half-brother Philip but left him for Herod.)

18. John the Baptist kept reminding the people that the royal couple was living in adultery.

19. That's why Herod's wife, Herodias, hated John and wanted to have him executed.

20. But Herod hesitated to arrest John because he really believed him to be an honest man who was led by God. John's preaching bothered Herod, yet he always enjoyed getting reports about what John had to say.

21. It was about then that Herod threw a birthday party for himself. He invited as many people as he could. The palace banquet hall was packed with dignitaries from everywhere.

22. Then, at the height of the party, Herod asked his step-daughter to dance for his guests. She performed so well that she captivated everyone. And when she finished, she received a standing ovation. Before Herod knew what he was doing, he said to her in front of all the guests, "Ask for anything you want, dear, and I'll give it to you."

23. And to show everyone that he meant what he said, he confirmed his offer by an oath, saying, "Whatever you ask for, I

promise that you can have, even up to half of my kingdom."

24. She thanked her step-father and then left the banquet hall to find her mother and said, "What do you think I should ask for?" And without hesitation her mother said, "Ask for the head of John the Baptist to finally end your embarrassment and mine."

25. Then the girl came back in to see the king and said, "I would like to have you give me the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

26. The king was stunned and so were his guests. He hadn't expected that, but because he had given his word and taken an oath to confirm it, he decided that he couldn't change his mind without losing face, so he granted her request.

27. He called for the executioner and asked him to execute John immediately and to bring in his head on a platter. The executioner went to John's prison cell, and woke him up, and beheaded him.

28. Then he brought John's head, still dripping blood, into the party on a platter, and in front of Herod, gave it to the girl, who in turn went and gave it to her mother.

29. The next morning, when John's disciples heard this, they went to the prison and begged for his body. They took it and buried it in a tomb. This is why Herod was so interested in Jesus.

30. Now when the twelve disciples came back from their outreach mission, they told Jesus everything that had happened, what they had taught, and what they had done.

31. Jesus said to all of them, "Let's go find an isolated spot in the desert where we can talk and get some rest." He said this because people were constantly coming to see Him and His disciples so that they didn't even have time to eat.

32. They got into one of the fishing boats and pushed off to find a quiet place in the desert not too far from the lake where they could be by themselves.

33. But the people saw them leave and noticed in what direction they were heading, so they walked around the lake to find them. As they went, people from other towns and villages along the way joined

them. Finally they found them.

34. When Jesus saw all these people and realized how far they had walked to find Him, He had compassion on them. They looked lonely and forsaken like sheep without a shepherd. So He asked them to sit down and started to teach them.

35. Late in the afternoon the disciples came to Jesus and said, "This place is a long way from any town and it won't be long before the sun sets.

36. Don't you think we ought to send these people home so they can make it to some of the nearby villages to buy something to eat before it gets dark and the marketplaces close up? They must be starved because they haven't eaten anything all day!"

37. Jesus said, "If that's the case, we better feed them." The disciples said, "You don't mean that we should go to buy food for all these people, do you? That would cost about two hundred days wages!"

38. Jesus answered and said, "How much food do we have? Check to see." After they checked everything they had, they came back and said, "All we have are five small loaves of bread and two little fish."

39. Then Jesus told the people to find a comfortable place to sit where there was a little bit of grass and to group themselves into small clusters.

40. They grouped themselves into clusters of about fifty to a hundred.

41. When the people were seated, Jesus took the five small loaves of bread and the two little fish, looked up to heaven, said the blessing, and then began breaking the loaves of bread in half, giving them to His disciples to distribute among the people. He also kept handing them fish to give out.

42. All of them ate, and there was plenty for everyone.

43. Afterward the disciples collected twelve baskets full of leftovers.

44. They counted and discovered that they had fed about five thousand men, and some of them had with them their wives and children.

45. As soon as they had picked up the leftovers, Jesus asked His disciples to get

into their boat and head back across the lake to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the people. He did this because He sensed that a move was under way to make Him king in place of Herod.

46. After the people and the disciples were gone, He climbed to the top of one of the hills to pray.

47. Soon the sun was setting, and He was alone in prayer while the disciples were struggling to row across the lake against some heavy wind.

48. Jesus could see them in the distance struggling against the wind and the waves and prayed for their safety as the wind over the lake seemed to be whipping up a storm. He also prayed that their anger would subside because He had sent them away just as they were preparing the people to forcibly crown Him king. Then in the early hours of the morning, when the disciples were exhausted from rowing against a wind that had become a full storm and they were too tired to be angry, Jesus decided to walk down the hill, onto the lake, and through the storm to help them. At first He appeared to be walking right by them.

49. When they spotted Him, they thought they were seeing a ghost and cried out to God for help.

50. They were all scared to death. Then Jesus called out with a strong voice and said, "Cheer up! It's me! Don't be afraid!"

51. So He walked around the waves and over to them and climbed into the tossing boat. Suddenly the wind stopped, the waves quieted down, and the lake was calm. The disciples, dumfounded and stunned by what they saw, tried their best to understand it all.

52. In fact, they still didn't understand how five thousand men could be fed with five loaves of bread and two little fish. They didn't understand because they had been angry with themselves for having listened to Jesus when He stopped them from making Him king.

53. **Finally** they reached the shore just south of Capernaum and disembarked.

54. As soon as Jesus stepped out of the boat, the people recognized Him.

55. They ran home to get their sick and

carried them on stretchers to Jesus to be healed. Soon the whole region was astir.

56. In fact, wherever Jesus went, whether through the countryside or into a city or village, people would lay the sick in the roads to be healed or beg Him just to let them touch His robe, believing that they would be healed, and they were.

CHAPTER 7

1. One day some of the local Pharisees and a few visiting teachers from Jerusalem joined the crowds that were following Jesus.

2. When they saw some of the disciples eating their lunch without having washed their hands, they criticized them in front of the people.

3. Before the Pharisees ate, they would wash their hands clear up to the elbow. They taught the people to do the same thing as a religious requirement handed down through time by the elders.

4. Another tradition required those coming home from the market not to eat until they'd washed their hands and forearms and gone through a whole ritual of cleansing. Still other rituals involved thoroughly washing each cup, plate, or water pitcher before using it.

5. So, when the scribes and the Pharisees saw the disciples eating without ceremonially washing their hands and forearms, they asked Jesus, "Why don't you and your disciples follow the tradition that we follow and wash your hands and forearms before you eat?"

6. Jesus answered, "Isaiah's prophecy about you is certainly correct when he spoke for God and said, 'These leaders will talk a lot about me, but they don't really love me.

7. Their worship of me is meaningless because they teach the people to do things that they themselves thought up.'

8. What you're doing is undermining God's law by constantly emphasizing the importance of rituals such as not touching your cups and plates before you've washed your arms and hands, and all other kinds of useless regulations just like it.

9. It's no wonder that God's Law has become meaningless to the people; because

you're constantly stressing the importance of your traditions.

10. Let me give you an example of what I mean. Moses said, 'Respect your father and mother. Anyone found cursing or rejecting his parents should be tried and then put to death.'

11. But you come along with your traditions and say it is acceptable for a son or daughter to say to his or her parents, 'I have promised to give all my money to the Temple, so I'm sorry, but I can't really help support you since the money has been promised to God.'

12. And you support this kind of negligence of parents by telling their children, 'If you spend this money to help your parents, you'll be cursed of God.'

13. By doing this, you've made the fifth commandment meaningless, and all because of your sense of values and emphasis on tradition."

14. Then Jesus turned to the people and said, "Listen to what I have to tell you.

15. Nothing on the outside of a person can morally defile him. It's what comes out of him that hurts him, not what goes in.

16. Think carefully about what I just said."

17. Then Jesus, seeing an opportunity to escape the masses for a short while, accepted an invitation to someone's house for dinner. When they were comfortably seated, the disciples asked Him what He was talking about.

18. He said to them, "You mean that you don't understand what I just said to the people? Can't you see that whatever goes into a man from the outside, like dirt from his unwashed hands, cannot possibly make him morally bad.

19. That doesn't affect his relationship with God, because it goes into his stomach, passes through his intestines, and then out of his body." (Jesus said this to show that food eaten with unwashed hands does not make a person unclean.)

20. It's what comes from his heart and out of his mouth that morally affects a man.

21. That's where evil begins, in a man's heart. From within him come evil thoughts,

adultery, murder,

22. theft, jealousy, hostility, deception, sensuality, suspicion, slander, pride, arrogance, and all kinds of sinful desires.

23. All these things come out from the inside and are morally wrong; that's what makes a man unclean."

24. **Then** Jesus left with His disciples and headed northwest to the region of Tyre and Sidon where He was invited to one of the homes. He was hoping to have a little peace and quiet, but it wasn't long before the word got around and people started coming.

25. A woman whose daughter was devil possessed heard where Jesus was and came and fell on her knees asking for help.

26. She was not a Jew, but a Greek with a Syrophoenician background, and she begged Jesus to cast out the demons who were tormenting her daughter.

27. Then Jesus, trying to demonstrate to the disciples their own bad attitude toward non-Jews, turned to her and said, "God's healing power is for His children. So it isn't right to take what belongs to them and give it to dogs."

28. But the woman answered, "That's true Lord, but even dogs are given the leftovers after the children have eaten."

29. Jesus responded, "Because of your determined faith, go in peace; your daughter is healed."

30. When the woman reached home, she found her daughter quietly resting on her bed, completely free from the control of the demons. By this act Jesus showed that He loved everyone whether they were Jews or not.

31. Leaving the area of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus returned to Galilee and on the way passed through the eastern part of the province of Decapolis, east of the lake.

32. There the people brought a deaf person who also had a speech impediment to Him, and they begged Jesus to heal him.

33. So He took the man aside, put His fingers in his ears, then wiped some moisture from His own lips and touched the man's lips.

34. Then He looked up to heaven, gave a big sigh and said, "Ephphatha!" meaning, "Open up!"

35. Instantly the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosed, and he could hear and speak.

36. Then Jesus told the people who had brought the man not to tell everyone what had happened, and the more He tried to tell them why, the more they shouted His praise and then left and spread the news everywhere they went.

37. They told those they met, "This man Jesus does everything so perfectly. He just restored a deaf and mute man's hearing and speech, and now the man hears and speaks better than anyone else!"

CHAPTER 8

1. It wasn't long before a huge crowd had gathered to hear Him. As the days wore on, He noticed how tired and hungry they were. So He called His disciples together and said to them,

2. "I feel sorry for these people, especially the ones with children, because they've been with me for parts of three days now and most of them haven't had a bite to eat.

3. If I dismiss them, I'm afraid some of them won't make it home because they've come a long way."

4. The disciples answered, "How can we feed all these people when there's not even a nearby market where we can go to buy anything?"

5. Then Jesus asked them, "How many small loaves of bread do we have?" They counted and said, "Seven."

6. So Jesus asked the people to sit down and make themselves comfortable. Then He took the seven loaves, said the blessing, broke each of the loaves in half, and started giving them to the disciples to pass out to the people.

7. The disciples had also a few small fish which they gave to Jesus. He took them, said the blessing, and then passed handfuls of little fish to the disciples to pass on to the people.

8. So the people ate until they were satisfied. Afterward the disciples collected seven baskets full of leftovers.

9. The number of people Jesus fed that day was over four thousand men, not counting women and children. When they

had finished eating, Jesus sent them on their way.

10. Then Jesus got into a boat with His disciples and asked to be taken across the lake toward Magdala.

11. **When** He arrived, the Pharisees met Him and started asking questions. They also they wanted Him to work a miracle for them as a sign from heaven proving that He was who He claimed to be.

12. He looked at them, heaved a deep sigh, feeling the sting of their skepticism, and then said to them, "Why do you always ask me to perform a miracle as proof of who I am? I want to tell you, I'm not working a miracle now or in the future just to prove something to you."

13. Then He returned to the boat, got in, and told His disciples to go back across the lake.

14. Now the disciples had given the leftovers from the day before away, and had forgotten to buy some bread for themselves. All they had with them was one tiny loaf which in no way was enough to feed thirteen men.

15. As they were thinking about what to do, Jesus said to them, "Be careful that you don't swallow the leaven of the Pharisees or the leaven of Herod."

16. They said to each other, "What did He mean by that? Is He trying to tell us what kind of bread to buy?"

17. When Jesus noticed how confused they were, He said to them, "Why is it that you can't understand what I'm saying? And why would you think I'm talking about food? Are your hearts that insensitive to spiritual values?"

18. You have eyes to see, ears to hear, and brains to think with. Please don't tell me that you've already forgotten what you've seen and heard.

19. Don't you remember what happened to the five little loaves of bread I took to feed five thousand people? After we fed them all, how many baskets full of leftovers did you pick up?" They said, "Twelve."

20. Then Jesus said, "And when I fed the crowd of four thousand with seven little loaves of bread, how many baskets full of leftovers did you pick up then?"

They said, "Seven."

21. "How is it then," He asked, "that you think I'm concerned about how much food we have in the boat or that I'm warning you never to let us go hungry again, when I could easily provide enough food to feed all of us? Can't you understand that I'm talking about theological and political leaven?"

22. Finally they crossed the lake and landed near Bethsaida. No sooner did they walk into town than the people recognized them and brought their sick to Jesus to be healed. Among them was a blind man.

23. Jesus took the blind man's hand and together they made their way through town and out the other side where Jesus stopped. He used a little saliva and mixed it with a tiny bit of dirt to make some clay. Then He took the clay and lovingly put some of it on the man's closed eyelids. Then Jesus told him to open his eyelids and tell Him if he could see.

24. The man said, "Yes, I can see! But the people look as large as trees!"

25. Then Jesus told the man to close his eyes and again He touched his eyelids with the clay. Then He asked the man to open his eyes again and look straight up. Then the man's eyes focused and he could see clearly.

26. Jesus said to him, "Don't go back into town but go straight home. Don't tell anyone you meet along the way what happened, otherwise too many people will come looking for me and we could be accused of causing a disturbance."

27. Then Jesus and His disciples headed north toward Caesarea-Philippi, and while they were walking along, He asked them, "Who do people think I am?"

28. And they said, "Some think you're John the Baptist raised from the dead. Others think you're Elijah returned from heaven or any one of the ancient prophets come back to preach."

29. Then Jesus asked them, "Who do you say I am?" Without hesitation Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Messiah, the Anointed One of God!"

30. Then He told them not to tell anyone who He was because it might stir up the authorities to try to arrest Him and

execute Him before His mission was done. Also, mingling among the people would be much more difficult.

31. He then told them that even though He was the Messiah, He would have to suffer at the hands of His own people. First He would be rejected by the elders, the priests, and the teachers, and then He would be arrested and executed. But on the third day after His death He would rise again.

32. He spoke about these things quite freely and openly. Finally, Peter couldn't be still any longer. He walked up to Jesus and started rebuking Him for even thinking that way, much less talking about it.

33. Jesus stepped away from Peter and, looking at all the disciples, He rebuked the presence of Satan and said, "Get behind me!" Turning back to Peter He said, "You're not throwing your influence on the side of God by trying to stop me, but on the side of Satan."

34. Later that day when a large crowd was following Him, Jesus suddenly stopped, called His disciples and the people close to Him, and said loud enough for everyone to hear, "Whoever wants to follow me must be willing to deny himself, take up his cross, and do God's will as I do.

35. Anyone who puts his own convenience first so that his constant concern is to have a richer, fuller life here, will eventually have no life at all. But whoever is willing to brave heartaches and suffering--even if it means the loss of his own life--for my sake, will be given eternal life.

36. For what profit is there in gaining the whole world and enjoying all the luxuries of this life only to lose your own soul and forfeit eternal life?

37. What can a man give to buy back the life he lost?

38. So if anyone in any generation is ashamed of me and my teaching and turns away from me, I will turn away from him when I come back in the glory of my Father surrounded by the holy angels."

CHAPTER 9

1. Then Jesus concluded by saying to His disciples, "Before some of you die, you

will have an opportunity to see a display of what it will be like when I come the second time."

2. Six days later Jesus chose Peter, James, and John to go with Him to the top of a mountain to be alone. When they reached the top, Jesus' body was suddenly transformed right before their eyes.

3. His robe became the brightest white, even whiter than snow, different from anything they had ever seen on earth.

4. Suddenly Elijah and Moses stood next to Jesus, one on each side of Him, and they started talking with Him.

5. Then Peter burst out saying, "Master! This is a great place! Let's stay here! We can build three shrines for you. One for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

6. He was so afraid that he didn't realize what he was saying.

7. Just then a cloud came and hovered overhead. A voice came out of the cloud saying, "This is my Son, the One whom I love. Listen to what He has to say."

8. Suddenly it was all over. As the disciples looked around, they saw no one with them but Jesus.

9. As they walked back down the hill, Jesus told them not to tell anyone what had happened and what they had seen until after His death and resurrection.

10. They wondered among themselves whether He was speaking of His own resurrection or the resurrection of others.

11. So they asked Jesus, "Why do our teachers tell us that Elijah must appear before the end comes and the resurrection takes place?"

12. He answered, "It's true that Elijah must come first before everything can be restored. The Scripture says also that the Messiah will have to suffer many things. His own people will treat Him with contempt and finally turn Him over to the Romans to have Him executed.

13. However, Elijah has already been here, and the people treated him with contempt. All this was according to prophecy."

14. When they got to the bottom of the hill and close to where they had left the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them listening to the scribes and

Pharisees asking questions.

15. The people were so interested in what was going on that they were caught by surprise when suddenly they saw Jesus among them.

16. Jesus turned to the scribes and Pharisees and asked them, "What are you telling these people?"

17. Instead of their giving an answer, one man spoke up and said, "Master, I brought my son here to be healed from devil possession.

18. An evil spirit has been controlling his whole life. It tells him where to go and what to do. It throws him to the ground, and he starts foaming at the mouth as if he's raving mad, then he grinds his teeth and his body stiffens as if he were dead. So I brought him to you. And when you weren't here, I asked your disciples to heal him, but they couldn't."

19. Jesus said out loud, "What an unbelieving generation. How much longer do I have to show you the power of God? Bring the boy here."

20. And as soon as they brought the boy to Jesus, the spirit took hold of him, throwing him to the ground, then into convulsions, and the boy kept rolling back and forth foaming at the mouth.

21. Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been going on?" He said, "Since he was a child.

22. In fact, many times the demon has thrown him into a fire or into the water either to burn him or to drown him. So if you can do anything, please have compassion on us and help us!"

23. Jesus said to the father, "It's not a question of if I can. It's a question of whether you believe I can."

24. Then the father cried out and said, "Master, I do believe, but please help my unbelief. Please help me to have the faith in you that I need!"

25. By this time people were gathering from all directions. When Jesus noticed this, He decided to end the conversation. He turned to the boy, addressed the demon, and said, "Come out and leave the boy alone. And don't ever bother him again!"

26. After letting out a shriek and throw-

ing the boy into a terrible convulsion, the evil spirit came out, but the boy lay as if he were dead. In fact, the people said, "Look! He's dead!"

27. But Jesus stepped over to him, took him by the hand, helped him up, to show that the boy was alive and well.

28. Later when Jesus and His disciples were eating lunch at someone's house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why couldn't we cast out the demon?"

29. Jesus answered, "To do this kind of healing, you have to be very close to God, because it's God who does the healing, not you."

30. Then they left the area and traveled throughout Galilee, staying away from the more populated areas because too large a gathering would slow their travels.

31. This gave Him a chance to teach His disciples. He said to them, "The Jewish leaders will soon reject the Son of God, who for their sake became a man, and they will turn Him over to the Romans, who will execute Him, but after three days He will rise again."

32. The disciples still didn't understand what Jesus was talking about, but they were afraid to ask Him what He meant because they didn't want to appear ignorant.

33. **After** days of travel, they finally arrived at Capernaum, and as they were having lunch at someone's house, Jesus asked His disciples, "What were you arguing about earlier today?"

34. They didn't answer Him because they had been arguing about which one of them would be the greatest when Jesus would set up the new kingdom.

35. After lunch they went out to a hillside. As they were trying to make themselves comfortable, Jesus asked them to come and sit closer to Him. Then He said, "If anyone wants to be first, he'll be last, because he has the wrong attitude to be first."

36. Soon there was a crowd around them, mostly mothers with children. Jesus took one of the little ones, gave him a hug, sat him on His knee, and turned to His disciples and said,

37. "Anyone who is as accepting and

loving as this child, and accepts and loves these children and their mothers, accepts and loves me. And, he not only accepts and loves me, but accepts and loves the One who sent me."

38. Later in the day, John said to Jesus, "Master, we saw someone using your name to cast out demons. But since he wasn't one of us, we stopped him."

39. John thought Jesus would compliment him, but instead Jesus said, "You shouldn't have stopped him, because no one can use my name to cast out demons and then turn around to say bad things about me."

40. If he doesn't say bad things about me, then he's not working against me, but he's building my reputation of being against evil.

41. Anyone who is kind to you and gives you a cup of water when you're thirsty, and does so because you belong to me, will be rewarded for even such a small act as that.

42. Anyone who scorns one of the little children we saw earlier today or an adult born newly into the faith out of love for me, He deserves to have a stone tied to his neck and to be thrown into the lake.

43. You need to be willing to sacrifice anything spiritually harmful in your life, even something as valuable as your right arm. And even though this means that you would have to live with a handicap, it is better to keep your spiritual values and live forever, than to go through life physically well and lose eternal life only to be burned up in the lake of fire.

44. This fire will do its work as thoroughly as worms eating up a dead body or a forest fire destroying trees.

45. Anything that holds you back spiritually needs to be cut off. If you have to do without a foot or an arm to keep your spiritual values, do so. Why choose to go through life being a great success if it means that you have to sacrifice eternal life to get ahead?

46. The consequences of such value decisions are also as sure as worms eating a dead body or a forest fire destroying trees.

47. This is also true even for something

as valuable as your eye. Whatever perverts your spiritual vision, get rid of it. It's better to be in God's kingdom at the expense of sacrificing your earthly status, than to be socially acceptable and have no future to look forward to except what you have here and now.

48. Placing anything above the kingdom of God will have results as sure as when worms eat a dead body or a forest fire destroys trees.

49. Every person's loyalty has to be tested here even though at times he may feel as if he's walking through fire. And every sacrifice he makes in order to keep his moral and spiritual values will function as a preserving agent for him, just as salt preserves food.

50. So choosing to sacrifice in order to keep your God-given values is good. As I said, it's like salt to you. Now if salt loses its taste, what good is it? You can't even use it to season your food. So he who is willing to sacrifice anything he has to hold on to the kingdom of God is himself like salt with a good taste."

CHAPTER 10

1. **From Capernaum** Jesus crossed the border into Judea and headed for the Jordan River. Again people found Him and crowded around Him, and, as He always did, He started teaching them.

2. Soon some of the Pharisees came to trap Him in theological talk, asking, "Is it right for a man to divorce his wife?"

3. Jesus asked, "What did Moses say about it?"

4 They said, "Moses allowed divorce as long as it was done legally and put in writing."

5. Jesus said, "True, but because men were disowning their wives and putting them out into the street for any little thing, that's why Moses made the law that he did. He didn't do it to make divorce acceptable as long as it was done right; he did this to curb divorce."

6. What you need to realize is that from the beginning when God created man and woman, He had no intention that they get divorced. In fact, divorce was one of the reasons why God brought on the flood.

7. God's original plan was for a man to leave his father and mother and stay with his wife.

8. For in God's sight, when two people are married, they are no longer considered like two unattached individuals but like one person with two harmonious natures.

9. You need to be careful not to portray Moses as working contrary to God's plan and tearing apart what God wants bound together."

10. Later His disciples asked Jesus the same question the Pharisees did.

11. Jesus answered by saying, "Anyone who divorces his wife just to marry another woman is being disloyal to his wife. It's just as if he went out to commit adultery with someone else while he was still married.

12. It's the same for a woman. If she walks out on her husband or sues him for divorce because she wants another man, it's just as if she went out to commit adultery with someone else while she was still married to him."

13. Soon a group of mothers were crowding around the house trying to bring their children to Jesus for a blessing. His disciples went outside and tried to chase them away.

14. But when Jesus saw what they were doing, He was displeased and followed them outside, saying, "Don't stop these mothers from bringing their little ones, and don't chase them away. This is what God's kingdom is all about.

15. In fact, unless people are as innocent and harmless as newborn babies, they cannot possibly have part in God's kingdom."

16. He reached out and picked up one little toddler after another and blessed each one of them.

17. Later, as Jesus and His disciples were walking down the road, a young man ran and caught up with them. He knelt down in front of Jesus and said, "Good Master, what must I do to have eternal life?"

18. Jesus said, "Why do you call me good Master? No one can be credited with goodness except God. Is that what you intended to say?

19. But let me answer your question. You know what the commandments say, 'Don't commit adultery; don't kill; don't steal; don't lie; don't cheat; and honor your parents.'"

20. The young man said, "Master, I've lived by the commandments all my life, ever since I was a child."

21. Jesus loved this young man's innocence, so He said to him, "To really test your commitment and to know what your priorities are, there's one thing you can do. Go home, sell what you have, and then give the money to the poor. This will be like putting your money into the bank of heaven. Then come and follow me and share the burden of my mission."

22. The young man was disappointed and hurt by what Jesus said because he loved his riches and his leisure life more than Jesus.

23. After he left, Jesus looked around at His disciples and said to them, "It's very hard for rich people to change. Yet they need to do so in order to be saved and to be in God's kingdom."

24. The disciples were stunned at what Jesus had just said. Then Jesus explained, "I want you to listen to me. Changing isn't easy for those who have made money making their top priority, even if they've earned their money legitimately. This is a new experience for them, trusting God for their salvation, since they've been told they could buy it. They find that God's kingdom operates on totally different principles.

25. It's like a fully loaded camel trying to force its way through an opening in the city wall that's too small for all the baggage it has on its back. Or, it's like trying to thread a needle with a rope."

26. These statements by Jesus really confused the disciples. They turned to each other and said, "If that's the case, how can we expect to be saved? If the well-to-do and educated people, whom God has apparently blessed, can't be saved, what hope do we have?"

27. Jesus interrupted them and said, "This may seem impossible or contradictory to you, but not with God because He knows everything and with Him nothing

is impossible.”

28. Then Peter spoke up and said, “How about our salvation? We don’t have much money to give, but we’ve left everything we had to follow you.”

29. Jesus answered and said, “No one who has left everything, even those he loves such as his brothers or sisters, or his parents, or his wife and children, and has done it because he loves me and wants to help spread the gospel,

30. will be shortchanged. He will receive one hundred times more satisfaction than houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and owning property can give him, even though he may be persecuted for what he believes. In addition to this, he has eternal life.

31. Many people who are now thought to be very close to God don’t really know what following me is all about. Others whom people think know little or nothing about God are often the closest to Him.”

32. **From** here they continued their journey toward Jerusalem. Jesus was leading the way and the disciples were lagging behind still trying to figure out what Jesus had meant and feeling a bit uneasy about the whole thing. Then Jesus stopped and let all twelve of them catch up with Him. When they did, He started telling them what they could expect and what would happen to Him once they reached Jerusalem.

33. “We’re heading for Jerusalem, but this won’t be a time for joy. The Messiah will be betrayed into the hands of the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will arrest Him, sentence Him to death, and then turn Him over to the Romans for sentencing.

34. They will make fun of Him, scourge Him, spit in His face, and kill Him. But three days later He will rise to life again.”

35. It was about this time that James and John, the Zebedee brothers, approached Jesus with a special request, saying, “Master, we know now that you’re willing to give us anything we ask for. So could you do something special for us?”

36. Jesus said, “What is it that you want me to do for you that’s so special?”

37. They said, “Let us sit next to you

when you set up your new government, with one of us on your right and the other one on your left.”

38. Jesus answered and said, “You really don’t know what you’re asking for. Do you think you commit yourselves to drink from the same cup of suffering that I’ve been drinking from and that God’s ministry demands? Are you willing to immerse yourself in the same mission I have immersed myself in?”

39. They said, “We’re ready!” Then Jesus said to them, “You’re right. You will soon taste rejection just as I am tasting it, and you will soon become immersed in the same mission that I am immersed in.

40. However, who will sit next to me in heaven, whether on the right or the left, is not for me to decide, but the Father will give those seats to whom they belong.”

41. When the other disciples found out what had happened, they were extremely upset with the Zebedee brothers.

42. So Jesus called all twelve of them together and said, “You know that in the world those who rule the people exercise their authority over them, expecting the people to serve them.

43. But that’s not what I want you to do. The one who wants to be the greatest among you must be willing to serve the rest of you.

44. So whoever wants to be the chief, let him first become a servant.

45. For even the Son of God has come to serve, not to exercise His authority over people, expecting them to serve Him. He has come as a servant to help all He can, and to give His life as a payment for sin.”

46. Soon Jesus and His disciples arrived at Jericho, and people streamed from their houses and started following them. Most of the crowd was still with them when they reached the outskirts of the city where blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the side of the road begging.

47. When someone ahead of the crowd told him that it was Jesus who was coming, he started yelling, “Jesus, divine Son of David, have mercy on me!”

48. People tried to quiet him because they were embarrassed with his constant yelling. But he yelled even louder, “Di-

vine Son of David, have mercy on me!"

49. When Jesus came to the spot by the road where Bartimaeus sat, He stopped and asked the crowd to make room for the blind man to come to Him. Someone went over to Bartimaeus and said, "Stand up! The Master wants to see you. Come, I'll help you."

50. Bartimaeus threw the blanket off his shoulders, jumped up, and, with the help of others, ran toward Jesus.

51. Jesus asked him, "What is it that you want me to do for you?" The blind man said, "Lord, I want you to heal my eyes and to make me see again!"

52. Jesus answered, "Turn around and go your way; because of your faith, I have healed you." Instantly, the man could see! But the man stayed by and he joined the crowd that followed Jesus.

CHAPTER 11

1. **When** Jesus reached the outskirts of Jerusalem, by way of Bethany, He stopped at the Mount of Olives overlooking the city and, turning to two of His disciples, said,

2. "Go into this nearby village. As soon as you enter, you'll find a young donkey tied to a post. Untie it and bring it here.

3. If anyone asks you what you're doing, tell him that the Lord needs to borrow the donkey for just a little while. It'll be returned soon."

4. The two disciples did as they were told. When they got to the village, they found a young donkey tied to a post in front of someone's house close to the entrance of the town just as Jesus had said. So they started to untie it.

5. Some of the townspeople standing nearby called out, "What are you men doing with that donkey?"

6. The two disciples said just what Jesus told them to say, and the people let them go.

7. They took the young donkey and led it up the hill to the top of the Mount of Olives where Jesus was. Suddenly the disciples realized what this could mean and joyously took off their outer robes and laid them on the donkey. Then Jesus got

on the donkey and sat sideways like the crown princes used to do just before their coronation and told the disciples to lead Him into Jerusalem.

8. When the people saw this, they were sure that Jesus would now proclaim Himself king and rule over Israel. In their excitement some of them took off their outer robes and spread them on the road for the donkey to walk on while others ran ahead and broke off palm branches and laid them down.

9. Still others ran ahead shouting, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessings on Him who comes in the name of the Lord." Then the people behind Him responded and shouted the same thing.

10. Together they shouted, "This is the new beginning of the kingdom of our father David! Blessings on Him who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna to the new king!"

11. When the procession reached the Temple, Jesus got off the donkey, told the two disciples to take it back, and went inside. Soon the two disciples returned, and since it was getting late, Jesus left the Temple for the nearby town of Bethany.

12. The next morning before breakfast, they left Bethany and headed back toward Jerusalem. All of them were hungry.

13. When Jesus saw a fig tree in the distance covered with leaves, He headed straight toward it, expecting to find some figs. When He got there, He looked, but didn't find a single fig. Although it was a bit early in the season, this particular tree, because it was so full of leaves, should have had some ripened figs.

14. Jesus said to the tree, "Never again will you deceive people with your pretense. This, then, will be your last season." The disciples heard what He said and wondered why He would speak that way to a tree.

15. Arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus went to the Temple and told those who were selling animals in the courtyard to leave. He went to the money exchangers and told them to leave, too. When they became defiant and refused to move, He went back to the first table, took hold of it, tipped it over and went so on down the line. Next

He went back to those who sold animals, and since they hadn't yet moved out, pushed over their shelves full of caged pigeons.

16. And He would not let anyone else come into the Temple who was planning to sell animals or exchange money.

17. Then He sat down and started teaching the people, saying "The Scriptures say that God's House is to be a house of prayer to which people from all nations can come and pray. But some have turned it into a place of cheating, fraud, and robbery."

18. When the Temple teachers and chief priests heard what Jesus had done and what He was saying, they determined to kill Him and would have done so then, but they were well aware that the people were very much attached to Jesus, and wherever He was, they were, listening to what He had to say.

19. Late that afternoon Jesus left the Temple and made His way out of the city.

20. The next morning as He returned to Jerusalem, He took the same route He had taken the day before. And the disciples were amazed as they noticed that the fig tree was dead from the roots up.

21. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said to the tree the morning before and said to Him, "Master! Look at that fig tree! You cursed it only yesterday and already the whole tree is dead!"

22. Jesus answered, "If you have faith in God,

23. you can even move a mountain. Anyone who has faith in God can tell a mountain to move and fall into the sea, and it will. This means no matter what hindrances you face in your mission for God, if you have faith in Him, they will clear up just as you believed they would.

24. That's why I keep telling you that as you pray, ask God to help you build your faith in Him, and He will do it.

25. But when you pray for greater faith, one thing you need to have is a forgiving spirit, so your heavenly Father can first forgive you.

26. But if you don't have a forgiving spirit and don't forgive others, your Father can't forgive you and give you the faith you ask for."

27. By then they had arrived at Jerusalem and made their way to the Temple. As soon as they walked in, the chief priests, the Temple teachers, and the elders were waiting to meet Jesus and said to Him,

28. "By what authority did you do the things you did yesterday? We'd like to know who gave you permission to do what you did."

29. Jesus answered, "Let me ask you a question first. Then, if you can answer my question, I'll answer yours and tell you who gave me the authority to do what I did.

30. What do you think about the ministry of John? Who authorized him to preach and to baptize? Was it God, or was it his own idea?"

31. They stepped aside and said to each other, "If we tell Him that John's ministry was authorized by God, He'll say, 'Why didn't you believe what he said and do what he asked you to do?'

32. And if we tell Him, 'We think John's ministry was his own idea,' we'll offend the people because they believe John was a prophet."

33. So they turned to Jesus and said, "We can't answer that question." Jesus replied, "Then neither will I answer your question about who authorized me to do what I did."

CHAPTER 12

1. Then Jesus turned to the people and began teaching them, saying, "A certain landowner planted a vineyard, built a wall around it, constructed a winepress, built a watchtower to guard the place, leased it out to grape growers, and then left the area to do some business elsewhere.

2. When the harvest season came, he sent one of his managers to the tenants to collect his percentage of profits from the sale of the grapes.

3. But the tenants caught the owner's manager, beat him up, and sent him back home.

4. So the owner sent another manager to collect his rightful share of the harvest's profits. But the tenants threw stones at him, hit him over the head until his face was covered with blood, made him a public

spectacle, and then sent him back home.

5. So the owner sent another manager, and when he came to the vineyard, the tenants killed him. And that's what happened to other managers that the owner sent. The tenants beat some and killed others.

6. Now the landowner had only one son whom he loved very much, and he decided to send him, telling himself, 'I know they'll respect my son.'

7. But when the tenants saw the son coming, they said to each other, 'This is the heir to the vineyard. Let's kill him, and then the old man will have to let us run the vineyard on our terms.'

8. So they grabbed the son, killed him, and threw his body over the wall outside the vineyard.

9. Let me ask you, what do you think the owner will do now? You know what he'll do. He'll come back, have the tenants arrested, and then turn the vineyard over to someone else.

10. Haven't you noticed what the Scriptures say in the Psalm that we sing as a hymn of thanksgiving? 'The stone which the Temple builders rejected suddenly became the stone they needed for the corner support.'

11. This experience which we sing about in our history was planned by God to teach you what would happen to me."

12. The Jewish leaders who were listening wanted desperately to get hold of Jesus and arrest Him, but they held back because of the people. Knowing He had told this parable to expose their plans, the leaders didn't touch Jesus but let Him continue teaching the people.

13. A little while later the Jewish leaders hand-picked some Pharisees and Herodians and sent them to talk with Jesus, to see if they could get Him to say something they could arrest Him for.

14. When they arrived, they said, "Master, we know that you're an honest man, that you're not pressured into doing or saying anything that is not right, and that you teach God's truth no matter what. Tell us, do you think it's right for Israelites to pay taxes to Caesar?"

15. Should we do this or shouldn't we?"

Jesus knew their reason for asking this and said, "Why are you trying to trap me into saying something that you can use against me? Do any of you have a penny? Let me see it."

16. They gave Him a penny. He looked at it and asked, "Whose picture and words are engraved on this penny?" They said, "Caesar's."

17. Then Jesus said to them, "So, give to Caesar what belongs to him and give to God what God expects you to give Him." And they stood there dumbfounded.

18. Afterward the Sadducees came. They were the ones who didn't believe in the resurrection. Their intention, too, was to trap Jesus. They said,

19. "Master, Moses said, 'If a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, then he should marry her and have children by her to keep his brother's name from dying out.'

20. Now we know of a case in which seven brothers were involved. The oldest brother married this woman and soon afterward died without leaving any children.

21. Then the next brother married her to keep his brother's name from dying out, but soon he, too, died before he could leave any children. The next brother down the line did the same and so on.

22. Now as incredible as it may seem, seven brothers were involved in this arrangement. Each one married her and died without leaving children. Finally the woman died also.

23. Now if people rise from the dead, whose wife will she be when she's resurrected? After all, she was married to all seven of them."

24. Jesus answered and said, "You don't recognize what the Scriptures are really saying about the power of God because you can't harmonize them with the way you understand things. You compare everything in the next life to what you understand about this life. Then on that basis you reject the plainest teaching of Scripture.

25. Have you ever thought of the probability that God could have plans for people in heaven other than for them to marry and reproduce? God does have other plans

for people, because when they are raised from the dead, they will live forever and no longer need to marry and reproduce. They will be more like the angels who have no need to perpetuate their own kind because they never die.

26. Now as far as the resurrection itself is concerned, haven't you read about Moses' experience, recorded in Exodus, how God spoke to him from out of the burning bush, saying to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?'

27. What was God telling Moses? He was telling him that He was the One who activated Sarah's dead womb and through Abraham gave life to Isaac, who in turn had a son called Jacob. Therefore God is not the God of death but the God of life! So your conclusion of no life after death is wrong."

28. One of the young Temple teachers, who overheard Jesus' conversation with the Sadducees, admired how expertly Jesus answered the question, so he asked, "Master, which of God's commandments is the most important?"

29. Jesus answered, "The most important commandment is, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.

30. You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' This is the most important commandment.

31. But the next commandment is just as important which says, 'You should care about your neighbor as you care about yourself.' No other commandments are as important as these two."

32. The young teacher responded, "Master, you spoke very well because there is only one God and no one in all of creation is like Him.

33. For someone to love Him and to give Him all his heart, his understanding, his intellect, and his physical strength, and then to care about his neighbor as much as he cares about himself is more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices one can afford to give."

34. Jesus was pleased with the young teacher's response and said to him, "I'm proud of you. You're on your way to

God's kingdom." After these encounters, no one was tempted to trap Jesus in His own words anymore.

35. So He continued to teach the people in the Temple with the Jewish leaders listening in, and He said, "Why do teachers say that the Messiah is the human descendant of David?

36. David doesn't call Him his son in that sense, but calls Him his Master. While under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote, 'The God of Israel said to my Master: Come sit on my right side until I have made your enemies subject to you.'

37. Now, if David calls the Messiah his Master, how can the Messiah be his son?" And no one was able to answer Him, not even the Jewish leaders. The common people, even though they didn't understand everything He said, gladly listened to Him.

38. Jesus continued teaching them, saying, "Be careful of teachers who love to dress up to impress others, and of those teachers who love to have people introduce them pompously.

39. Be careful of teachers who are always concerned with their own status, influence, and upward mobility, and who don't seem to mind advancing themselves at the expense of other people.

40. These kind of people don't hesitate to exploit poor widows by putting on a pious front in order to get the widows' money."

41. As Jesus was teaching, He was sitting fairly close to the Temple offering box. He began watching the people bring their offerings and the way they put them in the box. Many who came were quite well-to-do and gave large amounts and did it with a flair.

42. Then a poor widow came up to the box. She looked this way and that, and when no one was looking, quickly dropped in two pennies.

43. Jesus, anticipating this, drew the disciples' attention to her and said, "I want to tell you that this poor widow has given more in God's sight than all the other offerings given so far this morning.

44. The reason her offering is so valuable is that even though all the others have

given a generous portion of their income, they have given from their overflow. She has given from what she needs for herself."

CHAPTER 13

1. **That** afternoon, as they left the Temple, one of the disciples said to Jesus, "Master, have you noticed the huge blocks of granite that were used to build our Temple?"

2. Jesus looked and said, "Don't equate the future security Israel with these blocks of granite. These very blocks of granite which you see supporting of the Temple, as big as they are, will one day be pried apart, and the buildings of the Temple will be destroyed."

3. When they got to the top of the Mount of Olives just outside the city where the whole Temple was visible, Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to Jesus privately and asked Him,

4. "Master, tell us more about what will happen to the Temple in the future. Will there be signs to let us know when this will be?"

5. Then Jesus answered them and began outlining the future by saying, "First of all, be careful that you're not deceived, because

6. many self-appointed messiahs will appear before the end comes and people will be so gullible they'll believe and follow just anyone.

7. Secondly, there will be no end of wars and threats of war, but don't worry, because these things have to happen before the end can come.

8. And nations will continue to fight and kingdoms will continue to defend themselves more intensely as the end approaches. Also, earthquakes will be in the most unexpected places, famines will ravish whole countries, and troubles will be everywhere. These signs will only be the beginning of things to happen just before the end.

9. Next, don't be surprised if you find yourselves in trouble. You will be arrested, tried before juries, sentenced to be whipped, sometimes even in the synagogue courtyard, and you'll be brought

before state officials and heads of state all because of me. But your testimony before these men will give them an opportunity to hear the gospel and be saved.

10. You see, the good news of salvation, with its hope of the resurrection, must go to every nation.

11. And when you're arrested, don't worry about what you're going to say. Don't try to plan your speech ahead of time. Trust the Holy Spirit and plan to say whatever He tells you to say. Then He'll be able to put words into your mouth and will do the speaking for you.

12. In those days, even brothers will turn each other over to the police to be arrested and executed. And fathers will turn in their sons, and children will betray their parents to have them arrested and executed.

13. Everyone will hate you because of your loyalty to me, but hold out to the end and I'll come to rescue those who are mine and resurrect the ones who died because of me.

14. Furthermore, when you see the 'power that will make desolate' come with armies to attack Jerusalem as Daniel points out (and if you study Daniel carefully, you'll understand what I'm saying), then you'll have to leave the city and head for the mountains.

15. When you leave, you need to do it quickly. If you live in the city, don't take time to pack.

16. If you live in the country around the city, don't take time to go into town to do some last-minute food shopping.

17. Those will be hard days, especially for pregnant women and for mothers nursing their little ones.

18. That will also be the time to pray that you won't have to leave your houses during cold weather or on the Sabbath.

19. The collective suffering that will occur will surpass anything that has happened to God's people since the beginning of creation.

20. The destruction of life will be so terrible during those days that God will have to step in and stop it or no one would survive. This will be true not only for Jerusalem but also at the end of time when

God will have to step in to save His people from being totally destroyed.

21. In those days, religious excitement will know no bounds. So, when someone tells you, 'We saw the Messiah over here!' or, 'We saw Him over there!' don't believe a word they say.

22. Many will make messianic claims in those days, telling people that God has given them a message and a mission to fulfill. Some will even work miracles to prove it. Everything will be so convincing that even God's people will be shaken up.

23. The reason I'm telling you these things ahead of time is so you'll know what to look for.

24. Finally, just before the end comes, there will be supernatural signs as well. The sun will stop shining, and the moon will be dark.

25. Showers of falling stars will make it look as though the universe itself is going into convulsions.

26. That's when the Son of Man will appear in the clouds with power and great glory.

27. And He will send His angels out to gather His people from every part of the globe and all others from every part of His universe so that His whole family will be together.

28. Let me illustrate what I have said with a parable from the fig tree. When the branches of a fig tree become soft and it begins to bud, everyone knows that spring is here and that summer is coming.

29. So when you see the things I've told you happening around you, be sure the end is close, standing right outside your door.

30. In fact, these things will happen so rapidly that those who see some of these last things will live to see the end.

31. What I'm telling you is so certain that heaven and earth will disappear before my words will.

32. However, you'll not be able to pinpoint the exact hour or even predict the exact date when the end will come. Even the angels don't know the precise time, and neither do I, but the Father only.

33. So the best thing to do is to stay awake and be alert. There is no way to

precisely know when the end will come.

34. The way to look at all this is to compare the Messiah to a man taking a long trip who put his servants in charge of his house and fields. He assigned to each man his work, and told the doorkeepers to stay alert and warn the others as the need arose."

35. The Jesus added "You need to stay alert because, even though you see these things and get closer to the end of time, you won't really know when the Messiah will come back. In that way, He won't surprise you and come unannounced either in the evening, at midnight, just before dawn, or early in the morning.

36. So let me say it again. You need to stay alert or you'll fall asleep. And it'll be the same as hearing a sudden knock on the door and the Messiah will be here.

37. What I'm telling you is for everyone living in Jerusalem and in the surrounding area. And this warning applies also to those living at the end of time. So stay awake!"

CHAPTER 14

1. **Two** days later came the Passover Feast, also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The leading priests and teachers were still trying to figure out how to arrest and execute Jesus without causing a public disturbance.

2. They said to themselves, "Let's not attempt it on a feast day because the risk of upsetting the people is too great on a religious holiday."

3. In the meantime, Jesus had accepted an invitation to go to Simon's house in Bethany. Earlier He had healed Simon from leprosy. Bethany was only a short distance from Jerusalem. While Jesus was at dinner, a woman came into the house with a small bottle of extremely expensive perfume. She made her way over to Jesus, opened the bottle, and began sprinkling the perfume on His head and beard.

4. Some who were there became very displeased with her when they realized what she was doing. They were saying to themselves, "What a waste!

5. This perfume could have been sold for thousands of dollars and the money

donated to help the poor."

6. Jesus, sensing their displeasure, said, "Don't bother her. Let her finish what she's come to do. She's been moved by the Holy Spirit to do something special for me.

7. You will have plenty of opportunities to help the poor because some will always be in need of help, but I won't be with you very much longer.

8. She did what she thought was right and perfumed my body for burial.

9. And I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached around the world, her act of thoughtfulness and love will also be told as a memorial to her."

10. That same afternoon Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve disciples, went to the chief priests to arrange to betray Jesus.

11. As the priests listened to Judas, they were happy to accept his offer and pay him for his services. From that time forward Judas waited for just the right time to carry out his plans.

12. On Thursday, which was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the day the Passover lamb was to be sacrificed, the disciples asked Jesus, "Will we eat the Passover Supper together as people are supposed to, and if so, where should we go to eat it?"

13. Then Jesus called two disciples from the group and said to them, "Go into town, and just as you get inside the city limits, you'll see a man carrying a huge earthenware jar of water on his head. Follow him.

14. Enter the same house he does and find the owner. Say to him, 'Our Master wonders whether He may eat the Passover Supper with His disciples in your large upper room.'

15. He'll then take you and show you a large upper room, furnished and all prepared for us. Thank him, and then make any other preparations you need for this evening."

16. The two disciples left, went into town, and saw the man Jesus had said would be carrying a huge earthenware water jar on his head. They followed him, and everything else took place just as Jesus had told them it would. Then they pre-

pared things for the evening meal.

17. Not many hours later Jesus came into town with the rest of His disciples.

18. When they sat down to eat, Jesus said to them, "I would like to let you know that one in our group who is eating with us tonight will tell the priests of my whereabouts so they can arrest me."

19. This came as a shock to them, and one by one they asked Jesus, "You're not talking about me, are you, Master?" Or, "Master, you don't think that I would do such a thing, do you?"

20. He said to them, "The one who will do it is right here. He will dip his piece of bread into his bowl during the meal at the same time that I do.

21. Now the Son of Man will die just as the Scriptures say He will, but I feel sorry for the man who chose to betray me and inform the priests where they could find me. It would have been better for him if he had never been born, than to grow up only to betray me."

22. As they were ready to eat, Jesus took the loaf of bread in front of Him, said the blessing, and then broke it and passed the half to the disciple on either side of Him and said, "Take a piece off this bread and eat it as a symbol of eating part of me."

23. Then He reached over, took the cup of grape juice sitting in front of Him, gave thanks, and passed the cup to the disciple next to Him for all to drink from, which they did.

24. Then He said to them, "This pure juice which you just drank symbolizes my blood that I'm ready to shed for you and by which I'll carry out the agreement my Father and I made from the beginning.

25. And the act of drinking this juice is so meaningful to me that I will not taste it again until we will eat together in God's kingdom."

26. Then they sang a hymn and left for the Mount of Olives just outside the city.

27. As they walked along, Jesus said to them, "Tonight, when they come to arrest me, every one of you will run to protect himself. This is what Zechariah prophesied when he said, 'They will smite the Shepherd and the sheep will scatter.'

28. But I'll always love you. When I

rise again, I'll meet you by the lake of Galilee where we often had such good times together."

29. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Everyone else may run to protect himself, but I won't!"

30. Jesus said, "Let me tell you, Peter, you'll not only run to protect yourself, but before sunrise and before you hear a rooster crow two times, you will have denied knowing me three times."

31. This prediction by Jesus made Peter speak up even more about his loyalty to Him. He said, "If I have to die for you, I will! And I certainly won't deny knowing you!" And all the other disciples said the same thing.

32. Finally, they came to the little park called Gethsemane just outside the city. Jesus said to His disciples, "Stay here and make yourselves comfortable while I find a place where I can be alone to pray."

33. He asked Peter, James, and John to come a little way with Him. As they walked on into the park, Jesus became very sad, and as it became evident that He was deeply depressed, the disciples didn't know what to say.

34. Then Jesus said to them, "I feel a terrible depression that seems to be eating right into my soul, so that I feel like dying. Why don't you stay here, because I need desperately to talk to my Father alone. Pray for me while you wait."

35. Then He walked just a few steps farther and fell on His knees and prayed that this awful depression would leave Him and that He wouldn't have to go through what lay ahead of Him.

36. He prayed, "Dear Father, everything is possible for you, so please take away this awful cup of suffering that I'm drinking from. Yet, you know what is best, and I'm willing to do whatever you want me to do."

37. After this He got up from His knees and went back to the three disciples who were nearby and found them sleeping. He gently shook Peter awake and said, "Simon, why are you sleeping? Can't you stay awake and say one prayer for me?"

38. If you did, it would help you, too, and would keep you from denying me

later on. But I understand. Your spirit is willing, but your body is tired."

39. Then He went back to where He had prayed before and went through the same struggle again. And again He made the same decision to do what His Father wanted Him to do.

40. When He came back to the disciples the second time, He found them still asleep, and when He gently tried to wake them up to talk to them, He found that they were sleeping so soundly they didn't even respond.

41. Again He went and prayed. And when He came back to the disciples the third time and still saw them sleeping, He quietly said, "You may as well sleep on now because my struggle is over. But in one sense I'm glad that you were able to get as much sleep as you did. In a minute or two they'll be here to arrest me because one of our own has told them where to find me. And they're determined to get me and have me executed."

42. Then He shook them awake and said, "You better get up now because the one who betrayed me is already coming through the park with the authorities to arrest me."

43. And while Jesus was still talking to His sleepy disciples, Judas, one of the original twelve, was nearby looking for Him. With him, were men carrying torches, soldiers with swords, Temple officials, including some of the chief priests and elders, and a mob carrying sticks and clubs. Just as Jesus finished waking up the three disciples and warning them, Judas found them.

44. Now Judas had told the authorities that he could pick out Jesus in the dark and that he would walk up to Him and give Him a kiss. And whomever he kissed would be the One they should arrest, and they should let the others go.

45. And that's exactly what happened. As soon as Judas saw Jesus, he went up to Him and said, "Master, I finally found you!" Then he put his arms on Jesus' shoulders, drew Him close, and kissed Him on both cheeks.

46. Immediately the soldiers stepped forward, grabbed Jesus, and told Him He

was under arrest.

47. But when one of the three disciples saw this, he pulled his sword and swung it at the servant of the High Priest. The man ducked, but the sword sliced off his ear.

48. Then Jesus spoke to the priests and the others and said, "Looking at all your swords and clubs, you must have come out here expecting to arrest a vicious criminal. Why do you need all these weapons to arrest me?"

49. Every day this week you saw me teaching openly in the Temple. Why didn't you arrest me then? It would have been so much easier for you. Well, I know why, because the prophecies about me said that this is how it would happen."

50. Suddenly the disciples, who were now all in the garden, began to run away to protect themselves.

51. But one of the younger ones was determined to stay by Jesus, and when the soldiers saw this, they grabbed him to arrest him, too. But that night, instead of having on his warm robe, he just had a blanket wrapped around him, and when they grabbed him,

52. he twisted out of it and ran off half naked, leaving his blanket behind.

53. So they led Jesus away to see the High Priest. It seemed as though all the chief priests, elders, and Temple teachers had gathered together.

54. Peter finally stopped running and decided to turn around and follow the mob, the soldiers, and the officials, but at a safe distance. He was even able to get into the courtyard of the High Priest's palace and mix with the group of servants who were warming themselves by the fire trying to take in everything they could.

55. In the meanwhile, the chief priests and the other council members tried to get someone to be a witness against Jesus, to give them strong enough evidence to secure a death sentence, but they couldn't find anyone.

56. A number of people volunteered, but their testimonies proved false because they contradicted each other.

57. Then some others volunteered. They twisted His words, saying,

58. "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this Temple that people built and will build it again without anyone's help.'"

59. But their testimony didn't agree enough to determine exactly what Jesus did say.

60. Then the High Priest stood up and asked Jesus, "Don't you have anything to say? Haven't you heard what these people have said about you?"

61. But Jesus didn't answer. So again the High Priest spoke to Him and said, "Are you really the Messiah, the Son of God?"

62. Jesus responded and said, "I am. And you will one day see the Son of Man appearing in the clouds of heaven, sitting on the right hand of God, exercising the full power of God."

63. When the High Priest heard this, he took hold of his tunic and tore it in two and said, "We don't need any more evidence!"

64. We've just heard His blasphemy by calling Himself God! Is there any question about what we should do with Him?" And all the council members pronounced Him guilty.

65. Then those standing near Jesus spit on Him. Others threw a small blanket over His head and started slapping Him and mocking Him saying, "If you're God, then tell us which one is hitting you!"

66. While all this was taking place, Peter was still outside in the courtyard warming himself by the fire. Then one of the maids of the High Priest came up to the fire.

67. When she saw Peter standing there warming himself, she looked at him and said, "Didn't I see you with Jesus, the One called the Nazarene?"

68. But Peter denied it by saying, "I don't understand what you're talking about," and walked away from the fire. Just then a rooster crowed.

69. A little later this same maid saw him standing to one side and said, "This man is one of them I saw with Jesus!"

70. Again Peter denied knowing Jesus. Then others spoke up, "We think this girl is right." Turning to Peter they said, "You are one of Jesus' disciples! In fact, your Galilean accent gives you away."

71. Peter began to curse and swear and in the most foul language said, "I'm telling you, I don't know the Man!"

72. And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had told him the previous evening, that before he would hear the rooster crow twice, he will have denied Him three times. Ashamed of what he had just done, Peter left the courtyard and ran all the way to the park where they had been a few hours before and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER 15

1. As soon as day began to dawn, the chief priests called an official meeting of the national Council; having one at night was illegal. Those elders and Temple teachers, together with the priests who made up the Council, consulted together and confirmed the previous night's decision. Then they took Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor, to have the death sentence ratified.

2. When they arrived, Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the rightful King of the Jews as they say you claim to be?" And Jesus said, "You're correct in what they say."

3. Then the chief priests accused Jesus of many things, but He said nothing.

4. Finally, Pilate turned to Jesus and said, "Aren't you going to say anything to defend yourself? Haven't you heard all the charges that they're bringing against you?"

5. But Jesus said nothing. Pilate was amazed.

6. Now it was the custom at the Feast of Unleavened Bread for the Roman governor to release one Jewish prisoner and to let the people choose which one.

7. Recently, the Romans had arrested a Jew called Barabbas with two of his accomplices for attempting to overthrow the Roman government and for committing murder in the process.

8. By now the crowd had started chanting for Pilate to release a prisoner as he had done before.

9. So he tried to influence their choice by asking, "Wouldn't you like me to release the man who claims to be your king?"

10. Pilate made that suggestion, hoping to let Jesus go, because he was convinced in his own mind that Jesus was innocent, that His arrest and conviction was a political move plotted by the Jewish leaders.

11. These same leaders were the ones who told the people to shout for the release of Barabbas and not for Jesus.

12. Once again Pilate tried to get the crowd to ask for Jesus' release, saying, "If you want me to release Barabbas, then what should I do with the man who claims to be the rightful King of the Jews?"

13. The crowd yelled back, "Execute Him!"

14. Pilate answered, "Why should I execute Him? What crime has He committed?" But the crowd yelled back even louder, "Execute Him!"

15. Eager to avoid a riot, which could have political consequences, Pilate decided to give in to the crowd's demand. He released Barabbas. Disgusted with the Jewish leaders, he ordered Jesus to be flogged by scourging, and then executed by crucifixion.

16. The Roman soldiers led Jesus into the courtyard below, also called the Praetorium, and called out the whole detachment of troops from their barracks to come watch the fun.

17. They draped a purple-colored robe over Jesus' shoulders, made a wreath out of a branch of thorns to serve as a crown, and forced it down on His head.

18. Then they pretended as if He were a king and shouted in His ear, "Hail to you, King of the Jews!"

19. They also hit the crown of thorns with their sticks, driving the thorns deep into Jesus' head. They spit in His face, and cursed Him as they knelt down in front of Him in a pose of worship.

20. When they finished having their fun, they took away the purple-colored robe, flogged Him by scourging, put His own robe back on Him to cover His mangled back, and led Him away to be crucified.

21. On the way to the execution site, the soldiers realized that Jesus was not able to carry the heavy beam of the cross all the way through the streets of Jerusa-

lem and on up the hill to Golgotha. So from the crowd they grabbed a man called Simon, who had moved to Judea from North Africa and had been living in the hill country. They made him pick up the heavy beam that Jesus had collapsed under and forced him to carry it through the streets of Jerusalem and on up the hill to the crucifixion site.

22. Finally they reached the top of the hill called Golgotha, which means the Hill of the Skull.

23. There they offered Jesus a drink of drugged wine to kill the pain, but He refused to take it.

24. After they had tied His arms to the cross beam and nailed His hands and feet in place, they uprighted the cross with Him hanging on it. Then they sat down in a circle and gambled over Jesus' seamless robe, which someone gave Him, so that each man could have a chance to get it.

25. It was about nine o'clock in the morning when Jesus was crucified.

26. The plaque Pilate ordered to be nailed on the cross just over Jesus' head read, "The King of the Jews!"

27. The two criminals who were crucified with Jesus had been accomplices of Barabbas, and one was on Jesus' left and the other on His right.

28. This was just what the Scripture had predicted when Isaiah said, "He will be treated as a criminal."

29. As the people filed by at some distance, they shook their heads at Him and shouted, "So you are the One who was going to demolish the Temple and build it again in three days!"

30. Why don't you save yourself first? Come on down from the cross so we can believe you!"

31. The leading priests also made fun of Him, saying to each other and to the Temple teachers standing nearby, "If He really worked so many miracles to help others as they say He did, then why doesn't He work a miracle to save His own life?"

32. If He's really the Messiah, the real King of Israel, as He claims He is, then why doesn't He come down from that cross so we can believe that He is the One He says He is?" And the two criminals who

were crucified with Jesus also cursed and insulted Him.

33. Suddenly, at twelve o'clock noon, dark clouds appeared in the sky as if from nowhere. For the next three hours, the whole countryside was in total darkness.

34. Then, about three o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus shouted, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you left me?"

35. Some people standing nearby heard it and said, "Listen! He's calling for Elijah!"

36. Somebody ran and filled a sponge with drugged wine, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus. Someone else said to others nearby, "Wait! Let's stay here a little longer to see if Elijah really will come to get Him down from the cross."

37. Suddenly Jesus shouted as loud as He could and died.

38. At that same moment, the heavy Temple curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was torn in half from top to bottom.

39. When the captain of the Roman guard, who was standing near the cross all this time, saw these things happening and heard Jesus shout for God the way He did and then die, he spoke up loud enough for those nearby to hear and said, "I believe this Man was the Son of God!"

40. Also, some women were standing at a distance during all these hours; one of them was Mary Magdalene, the other, Mary, the mother of James the Younger and of Joseph, and Salome, the wife of Zebedee,

41. who had followed Jesus when He was in Galilee and did all she could for Him and His disciples. Other women from various parts of the country who had followed Jesus to Jerusalem were also there.

42. Now since all this happened late Friday afternoon, it would soon be time for the Sabbath to begin.

43. Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Jewish government and one who longed for the coming of God's kingdom, gathered courage, and went to see Pilate to ask for permission to take down the body of Jesus and bury it.

44. Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus had died so soon and sent for the

captain of the guard, not only to verify it, but to find out how long Jesus had been dead.

45. After he was satisfied that Jesus was dead and not just unconscious, he gave Joseph the permission he asked for.

46. Joseph went back into the city, got some white linen cloth, and with the help of others took down the body, wrapped it, and laid it out in a nearby tomb carved out of the side of the hill. Then they sealed the opening by rolling a huge boulder in front of it.

47. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James the Younger and of Joseph, stayed there to watch until the tomb was sealed.

CHAPTER 16

1. When the sun had set and the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James the Younger, and Salome, the wife of Zebedee, prepared burial spices so that first thing in the morning they could go to the tomb to anoint the body.

2. Very early Sunday morning, on the first day of the week, just as dawn was breaking, they arrived at the burial site.

3. As they made their way to the tomb, they said to each other, "Who is going to roll away that huge stone from the opening for us?"

4. But when they came to the tomb, the stone had already been rolled away.

5. This seemed strange to them, so they cautiously went inside the tomb where they saw a young man dressed in a white robe, sitting to the right of the slab where Jesus' body had been. The women were frightened.

6. The young man spoke to them and said, "Don't be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He's not here. He's risen. Take a look and see. The body is gone.

7. Listen, go back to Jerusalem and tell His disciples, especially Peter, that Jesus has risen and that He has gone to meet them by the lake of Galilee. He'll meet them there, as He said He would."

8. Then the women turned around, left the tomb as fast as they could, and two of them ran back to the city, afraid and yet

amazed at what they had seen and heard. They didn't tell anyone because they thought no one would believe them.

9. Mary Magdalene, the one out of whom Jesus had cast the same demon seven times, did not run back to the city as the other two women had. She couldn't stop sobbing over the missing body of Jesus. Just then Jesus walked up to her and talked with her. This all happened very early in the morning before anyone else had seen Jesus.

10. Then Mary ran back to the city to where the disciples were staying and mourning over what had happened to their Master.

11. They listened to her tell her story, how Jesus was alive and that He talked with her. But they didn't believe her.

12. Later that day, Jesus appeared to two of His followers on the road going from Jerusalem toward Emmaus.

13. They, too, ran and told the disciples what had happened, but the disciples didn't believe them either.

14. That evening, Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples while they were eating and gently chided them for their lack of faith in not believing the reports of His resurrection.

15. After that He said to them, "Go and preach the good news about me to the whole world.

16. Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved, but those who do not believe will have no choice but to reap the consequences of their sins.

17. And, those who believe will be able to work miracles. They will cast out demons in my name; they'll preach in other languages.

18. When they're bitten by poisonous snakes or happen to drink something poisonous, it won't hurt them. And they'll lay their hands on the sick and heal them."

19. After the Lord had stayed with them a few more days, He ascended to heaven to sit on the right hand of God the Father.

20. The disciples went everywhere preaching the good news about Jesus. And through the Holy Spirit, the Lord worked along with them, confirming the message by mighty miracles. Amen.

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

CHAPTER 1

1. **Most** excellent Theophilus: There are many who have written in more or less an orderly fashion what Christians believe and what happened among them.

2. And many reports about Jesus were handed down to us orally by those who saw Him and saw what He did.

3. So it seemed good for me to sit down and do the same thing, the Holy Spirit guiding me in the writing of it. Now the things I'm telling you I've heard firsthand, and those reports that have been written I've examined very carefully.

4. The reason for my sending this report to you is that I want you to have in writing the things I've told you and taught you.

5. Now there was in the days of Herod the Great, king of the Judean Territory, a certain Jewish priest called Zachariah serving his turn in the priestly order of Abijah. His wife's name was Elizabeth, a descendant of Aaron, the first Jewish High Priest.

6. Both were upright, honest people, keeping God's commandments and blamelessly carrying out the instructions of the Lord given to priestly families to follow.

7. This couple had no children of their own because Elizabeth was unable to have any. And now both of them were old and she was well beyond childbearing age.

8. It so happened that Zachariah was in Jerusalem in the Temple taking his assigned turn serving as priest.

9. And that particular day he went into the Holy Place to offer incense,

10. while outside a huge crowd of people were saying their prayers.

11. Suddenly an angel of God appeared standing on the right side of the Altar of Incense.

12. Zachariah was stunned and stood there too scared to move.

13. But the angel spoke reassuringly to him and said, "Don't be scared, Zachariah, for your prayer for a child is heard and your wife Elizabeth will become pregnant and give birth to a son whom you should call John.

14. And both of you will be happy and

many others will be made happy, too.

15. He will be called to do a great work for the Lord. He will live a simple life, never taste wine or other strong drinks, and be guided by the Holy Spirit from the day he is born.

16. And during his ministry he will bring many of the children of Israel back to the Lord their God.

17. He will preach with the spirit and power of Elijah as the Holy Spirit goes ahead of him. He will soften the hearts of parents toward their children, and many of the disobedient who will hear him will become wise and turn their lives around to become honest, just people. In all of this he will be preparing men's and women's hearts to receive the Messiah."

18. When Zachariah found his voice, he said to the angel, "How will I know that what you're telling me is the truth? After all, I'm an old man and my wife is also up in years."

19. And the angel answered his question and said, "I am Gabriel and stand in the very presence of God, and He is the One who sent me to tell you this and to share with you this good news.

20. However, since you question the truthfulness of what I've told you, let me give you a sign to help you believe. You will be dumb and not able to speak again until the things I've told you have happened and Elizabeth gives birth to a baby boy."

21. Meanwhile, the people outside were waiting for Zachariah to come out and bless them as he was supposed to do and were wondering what was taking him so long.

22. Finally he came out, but couldn't talk, and the people concluded from his gesturing to them that he had had a vision while in the Temple offering incense. And he kept making signs to them, but was unable to speak just as Gabriel had said.

23. After he completed his priestly assignment and finished his Temple duties, he left for home.

24. Soon afterward his wife Elizabeth conceived and then for the next five months stayed at home to take care of herself.

25. She told herself, "God has been good to me in my old age. He has answered my prayer to give me a baby and to take away the feeling that there is something wrong with me. So I must take care of myself and the baby."

26. Then in the sixth month of her pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a little city located in the province of Galilee.

27. He was sent to appear to a young virgin who was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph whose ancestor was King David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

28. And Gabriel said to her, "Greetings, Mary. God has decided to favor you. And may the Lord's blessings be ever with you. You are soon to be one of the happiest women in Israel."

29. When she saw Gabriel, she was not only frightened but also confused about what he was saying. She tried to figure it out, but couldn't.

30. Then Gabriel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God has been very gracious to you.

31. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and when you do, God wants you to call Him Jesus.

32. He will be the Son of God and will do great things for the Most High. Also, He will inherit the throne of His ancestral father David, which God has promised to give Him.

33. And He will rule over all the descendants of Jacob forever, and His reign will never end."

34. When Mary heard this, she said to Gabriel, "I can understand how God can make this happen to two old people as He did to Abraham and Sarah, but how can this happen to me when I'm not even married?"

35. Gabriel answered and said to her, "This will be by a special act of the Holy Spirit. His power will make you pregnant, and the Baby you will give birth to will be a holy Baby because you'll be giving birth to the Son of God.

36. God has blessed your cousin Elizabeth who never expected to have a baby at her age, and now she's six months pregnant. Soon she'll have a baby boy.

37. With God, nothing is impossible, even to make you pregnant; and His words are not empty promises."

38. Mary responded and said, "I willingly submit myself to God to be His servant and to have Him carry out His plan for my life. Let things happen to me just as you said." With this, Gabriel disappeared.

39. Immediately Mary went about making preparations to go and see her cousin Elizabeth who lived in one of the little villages in the province of Judea.

40. When she eventually got there, she eagerly told Elizabeth everything that had happened and that she was already pregnant.

41. And as Elizabeth listened to Mary tell her experience, the baby inside of her jumped for joy and the Holy Spirit inspired her to respond and say,

42. "God bless you, Mary! You are the most fortunate woman in Israel, and God is with the holy Baby that you are carrying.

43. And who am I, that the mother of my Lord and God, the mother of Israel's long-expected Messiah, should come and visit me?

44. And why do I say this? Because as I was listening to you tell your experience, the baby inside of me responded and jumped for joy!

45. Bless your heart, you believed the angel and it happened! You're pregnant! And all the other things he told you will happen, too!"

46. Then Mary was inspired by the Holy Spirit to say, "I just want to praise the Lord!

47. I love Him with all my heart and soul. He is my God, and He is my Savior.

48. He chose me to give birth to His Son, me, the least known of all the women in Israel. And to think that ever after I will be known as the one who was given this honor.

49. The Mighty One has not done this to me but for me, and made this unheard-of thing happen. Blessed and holy be His name.

50. In every generation His mercy and graciousness have been with those who wish to honor Him, and that's the way it

will always be.

51. Look what He has done in the past, how He scattered the proud when they became rebellious and belligerent.

52. He removed kings and rulers from their thrones and exalted the unknown and the poor.

53. He fed thousands of hungry people with good things from heaven while the proud and the rich went hungry.

54. He has always been ready to help Israel, keeping His promise to be merciful.

55. And all this is just what He promised to do for us when He spoke about it to our father Abraham. His promises are forever!"

56. Then Elizabeth invited Mary to stay with her for the next three months until she had her baby.

57. And Elizabeth didn't delay. She was right on time and gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

58. When her relatives and neighbors heard the news and how everything went well, they knew that the Lord had to be with her for her to deliver a baby at her age. And they all rejoiced with her.

59. Eight days after the baby was born, he was circumcised, and according to custom, he was then to be given a name. The relatives decided to call him Zachariah after his father.

60. Then Elizabeth spoke up and said, "Not so! We're going to call him John!"

61. But the relatives said, "There is no one in our whole family history who is called John."

62. So they went to the boy's father and by sign language asked him what he thought the boy should be called.

63. Zachariah asked for a pencil and a piece of paper and wrote, "The boy's name will be John." And the relatives were amazed that he chose to name the boy John.

64. Then suddenly the father's voice came back, and his ability to speak was as before. And the first thing he did when he opened his mouth was to praise the Lord his God.

65. The relatives and neighbors were awestruck to hear the old man talk again, and the news of his recovery spread

through that whole area of Judea.

66. Everyone who heard it took it to heart and said to each other, "With all this happening, what kind of a man will this baby grow up to be?" And so it was that from the day of his birth, the Lord guided the baby's life.

67. Now while the baby's father, Zachariah, was praising God in front of his relatives and neighbors, the Holy Spirit inspired him and the old man prophesied and said,

68. "Praise the Lord God of Israel because He has come to redeem His people!

69. He has given evidence of His power to save through Someone from the lineage of David.

70. As He said through His holy prophets for as long as we can remember,

71. 'I will deliver you from your enemies and from the hand of those who hate you.'

72. Yes, He will be merciful as He promised our fathers He would be. He has remembered and not forgotten His covenant.

73. He has not forgotten the oath He took when He talked with Abraham and He will fulfill His promise.

74. He will be merciful to us and deliver us from our enemies so we can serve Him in freedom and without fear.

75. So we can live holy lives and do what is right without hindrance or opposition as long as we live.

76. This baby will grow up to be a prophet for the Most High God and he will go ahead of the Lord to prepare people's hearts for Him to come.

77. He will help the people to understand the way of salvation and how to be forgiven of their sins.

78. He will help them to understand how kind and merciful God is and then God will shower His people with grace as if it were warm liquid sunshine.

79. And His grace will illuminate the hearts of those who are in spiritual darkness and on the verge of spiritual death and guide all of us in the way of peace."

80. And the baby grew, gaining physical and spiritual strength every day. And when he was grown, he lived alone in the

deserted hills of Judea until he began His public ministry.

CHAPTER 2

1. **Now** about this time Caesar Augustus decided to take a nationwide tax in each country throughout the Roman Empire.

2. This was one of the first such census-tax registrations and was begun in Syria and the surrounding provinces when Quirinius was governor.

3. And everyone in that part of the Roman Empire was required to go and register in the city or town where his ancestors came from.

4. So Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, who lived in the little city of Nazareth in the province of Galilee, had to travel down into Judea to the little town of Bethlehem to register there, because he was of the lineage of David; and that's where his ancestors had lived.

5. He was required to register along with his new wife, Mary, who was with child by the Holy Spirit and was now about to have her Baby.

6. It so happened that while they were there, it was time for the Baby to come.

7. And the Baby came and she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped Him in strips of cloth and used an animal's feeding trough for His cradle because all the rooms in town were full and they had to stay overnight in a barn.

8. Now this time of the year in the area around Bethlehem there were shepherds in the field who stayed by their flock all night.

9. Suddenly the angel Gabriel appeared to a group of them and when he did, he lit up the whole landscape, and the men were scared to death.

10. He said to them, "Don't be scared. I'm bringing you good news that will make you happy. And this is the kind of news everyone needs to hear.

11. A few hours ago, there was born in the city of David the promised Messiah and Savior of mankind who is the anointed of the Lord.

12. And when you look for Him, look for a Baby born in a barn, lying in an ani-

mal's feeding trough, wrapped in strips of cloth."

13. Then the whole sky lit up and a host of angels appeared and praised God, saying,

14. "Glory to God in the highest and peace to men on earth."

15. As soon as the angels disappeared, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go back into Bethlehem and find the Baby the Lord told us about!"

16. They left one of them in charge of the sheep and took off for Bethlehem. There they found Mary and Joseph and a Baby wrapped in strips of cloth. The Newborn was lying in one of the animal troughs.

17. When they saw the Baby they knew it was the One they were looking for, now as soon as it was morning, they went all through town spreading the news of what had happened and who this Baby really was.

18. And everyone who heard the news was excited about what the shepherds said.

19. Now Mary treasured all these memories, but she kept them to herself.

20. Later that day the shepherds came back to the barn still praising God for all the things they had heard from the angels, seen with their own eyes, and were told by Mary and Joseph.

21. Eight days later, the parents agreed to have the Baby circumcised and called Him Jesus as the angel had told them even before the baby was conceived.

22. And after the mother had waited out the prescribed forty days of her ceremonial purification before appearing in public, which was according to the law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took their Baby to Jerusalem to have Him dedicated.

23. This too was according to the Jewish law which says, "Every first-born baby boy should be dedicated to the Lord to recognize the Lord's special claim on him."

24. Also, Joseph and Mary carried out the ceremonial law which requires even poor parents to offer to the Lord the minimal sacrifice of two pigeons or turtledoves.

25. Now there was a man living in Jerusalem called Simeon who was known as a good, God-fearing person. He was

very eager for the Messiah to come and to comfort Israel.

26. And the Holy Spirit had told him that before he died, he would see the Messiah with his own eyes.

27. Also that particular morning, the Holy Spirit prompted him to come to the Temple and be there at the same moment that Joseph and Mary brought in their Baby to be dedicated as the law directed.

28. And when Simeon saw the Baby he knew it was the Messiah and he gently took the Baby from Mary's arms, held Him up, and praised God, saying,

29. "O Lord, you have kept your word to me.

30. You have let me see the Instrument of your salvation.

31. You are sending Him to us to save all peoples.

32. He will be a saving light to the world and to the honor of Israel."

33. And Joseph and Mary were amazed as they listened to what he said about their Baby.

34. Then Simeon handed the Baby back to Mary, blessed her, and said, "This Baby has been born to bring salvation and will cause people in Israel either to turn to God or to turn away from Him. And as people will talk about this baby and His ministry, they will show their real feelings and thoughts.

35. And when you hear what some will say, it will be like a sword going through your own soul."

36. There also was a prophetess named Anna in Jerusalem, the daughter of Phanuel, who belonged to the Jewish tribe of Asher. She was married when she was young and lived happily with her husband for seven years before he died.

37. Since then, she'd been a widow all her life and at this time was about 88 years old. She spent all her time in the Temple and could be found there any time, day or night, fasting, praying, and worshiping God.

38. Now just as Simeon finished talking to Mary, Anna came into the Temple, walked up to them, and started praising God. Then she talked to everyone in the Temple she could about the baby who had

come to redeem Israel.

39. After Joseph and Mary had finished the ritual of dedicating their baby according to the ceremonial law as given by the Lord through Moses, they returned north to their home in Nazareth in the province of Galilee.

40. It was here that the Baby grew up, getting stronger each day. He was filled with heavenly wisdom because God's Spirit was guiding His life.

41. Now once a year His parents would go to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Passover.

42. And when Jesus was twelve years old, they took Him along and made their way to Jerusalem as they had done in previous years.

43. After the feast was over, they started back home, but the Boy stayed behind. And in the squeeze of the crowd that left the city, and in conversation with their friends and relatives, they didn't realize that He had stayed behind.

44. They supposed He was somewhere in the crowd with the other pilgrims going back home. So they traveled the whole day without realizing that He wasn't along. When evening came and the group they were in stopped, they asked their relatives and friends if they had seen Him, but no one had and no one could find Him.

45. So they decided that the only thing to do was to go back to Jerusalem and look for Him there.

46. It took them all the next day to get back to Jerusalem and they arrived there late at night. Early the next morning, they started looking for Him and found Him with the doctors of theology, listening to them and asking them questions.

47. Everyone who heard the Boy was amazed at His understanding and insight.

48. And when Mary and Joseph saw Him, they stopped and listened and also were amazed at His wisdom. Finally His mother interrupted and took Him aside and said, "Son, you had us scared to death. We thought something had happened to you. Why did you do it? Why did you stay behind? Your father and I have been looking for you, crying our hearts out!"

49. He said to them, "You shouldn't

have worried so, and I'm sorry it took you so long to find me. I just had to spend more time in my Father's house before going back home."

50. But they didn't fully understand what He was saying.

51. So they traveled back home to Nazareth, and as before, He obediently listened to His parents. And Mary continued teaching and training Him, and she treasured all the precious experiences they had together.

52. And the Boy continued to develop physically, to increase in wisdom, and to grow in His relationships with both God and man.

CHAPTER 3

1. Now in the fifteenth year of the Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate was governor of the province of Judea, Herod Antipas was ruling the province of Galilee, and his brother Herod Philip was ruler of the territories of Iturea and Trachonitis, while Lysanias was over the region of Abilene.

2. During this time both Annas and Caiaphas were High Priests in Jerusalem. Annas had retired as High Priest and Caiaphas, his son-in-law, held office. It was at this time that God's Spirit told John, the son of Zachariah, who was now living in the desert area around Jerusalem, to begin his public ministry.

3. So John went all through the area around the Jordan River, not far from Jerusalem, preaching to the people that they should turn back to God and forsake their life of sin. And when they repented of their sins and changed their life, he baptized them.

4. This happened just like the old Hebrew prophet Isaiah predicted when he said, "There will come a man who will be a lone voice preaching in the desert, saying, 'Prepare the way for the coming of the Lord and let's make it easy for Him to come.'

5. We need to fill in the valleys and lower the mountains; we need to straighten out the sharp curves and smooth over the rough places in the road.

6. Then people will be able to see what

God's salvation can really do for them."

7. Often John would turn to the crowds that came to hear him and be baptized by him and say, "Some of you are leaders in the nation and people think you're harmless, but you're like snakes hiding in the grass ready to bite. If you're so innocent, why are you here? Are you afraid about what's going to happen to you when the Messiah comes to clean things up?

8. You need to live the kind of lives that reflect the love of God, and don't keep on telling yourselves, 'We are descendants of Abraham, so everything's going to be alright.' I want to tell you that God can create a whole new people out of these stones here and increase Abraham's descendants overnight. So don't keep telling us that it's our ancestry that makes us spiritual.

9. The time has come when heaven's ax will chop down all non-bearing trees right from the roots. That's what all good orchardmen do when their trees stop bearing fruit--they use them for firewood."

10. Then people asked him, "What do you want us to do?"

11. He said, "If you have two coats and you see someone shivering in the cold without one, give him one of yours. And if you have plenty to eat and you come across a man who hasn't had anything to eat for days, feed him."

12. And then some of the tax collectors who were convicted of sin and wanted to be baptized came and asked him, "Preacher, what do you want us to do?"

13. John answered and said, "Stop making money by collecting from people more taxes than they need to pay and pocketing the rest."

14. Soldiers also came out to hear him and some of them wanted to know what they should do. And he said to them, "Don't be so violent and so quick to hurt innocent people. Don't accuse someone of a crime that you didn't see him commit. And don't keep grumbling about your pay when you're already better off than a lot of people."

15. John's ministry created such an expectation in people's hearts of the soon coming of the Messiah that some won-

dered whether he himself wasn't the Messiah.

16. But John kept preaching saying, "I'm only baptizing you with water, but soon Someone will come who is much more worthy to baptize you than I am. I'm not even fit to untie His shoes. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and transform your sinful lives, not just cover you with water as I do.

17. I want to tell you that He will do some harvesting when He comes. He will separate the kernels of wheat from the chaff, store the wheat in His barn, and throw the chaff into the fire which will keep burning until all the chaff is gone."

18. There were a lot of other things John told the people.

19. He even told the people that Herod had done wrong by taking his half-brother Philip's wife away from him and marrying her, and told the people other things that Herod was doing which he was not supposed to do.

20. And this is why Herod had John arrested, adding another injustice to all the other unjust things he was doing.

21. Now one day as John was baptizing scores of people, Jesus also came to be baptized. After He was baptized, He offered a public prayer of thanksgiving, and suddenly the sky seemed to open up

22. and the Holy Spirit in the symbol of a dove hovered over Jesus' head. And then from out of the sky a voice spoke and said, "You are my only begotten Son, with whom I am well pleased."

23. Jesus was about thirty years old at this time, and according to His human ancestry, He was the son of Joseph and Mary who lived in Nazareth. And from there His ancestry goes back to Heli who was

24. the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph,

25. the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai,

26. the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda,

27. the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa,

the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri,

28. the son of Melki, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er,

29. the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi,

30. the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim,

31. the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David.

32. And David was the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon,

33. the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah,

34. the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor,

35. the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah,

36. the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,

37. the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan,

38. the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, who was the created son of God.

CHAPTER 4

1. Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit's power, left the region of Jordan and, guided by the Spirit, made His way out into one of the desolate areas surrounding the city of Jerusalem.

2. There He stayed for forty days, during which time He ate nothing. And it was then that He was so severely tempted by the devil.

3. And the devil came to Him in the form of an angel and said to Him, "If you're really the Son of God as you think a voice from heaven told you, then why don't you use your power to turn some of these bread-shaped stones into real bread to take care of yourself?"

4. Jesus answered him and said, "Man can't live just on bread alone, but his survival depends on whether or not he does what God asks him to do."

5. So the devil picked Him up bodily and carried Him to the highest mountain peak in the area to give Him a panoramic view of the beauty spots of the world and the luxurious and leisure living available there.

6. Then he said to Jesus, "This kind of easy living can be yours. In fact, I'll turn the whole world over to you and forever surrender my claim to it,

7. if you acknowledge that I'm a superior being to you."

8. Jesus answered him and said, "Get away from me because the Scripture says, 'You are to acknowledge God as your only superior and it's to Him alone that you are ultimately responsible.'"

9. Next Satan carried Him to the top of one of the Temple towers overlooking the valley below and said, "If you have so much confidence in God and in what He says, then why don't you do what He says?

10. As the Scriptures point out, God will send His angels to watch over you no matter what you do.

11. And when you're in danger, these angels will quickly rescue you so that you won't even stub your toe on a rock."

12. Jesus answered him and said, "The Scripture you're referring to also says, 'Don't take God's protection for granted by doing something foolish.'"

13. So the devil decided to end his temptation of Jesus for the time being and carried Him back to where he found Him and left Him alone.

14. Then Jesus, filled with the Spirit's power, returned to the province of Galilee where He had grown up and His fame soon spread throughout the whole region.

15. He taught the people whenever there was an opportunity to do so, whether in the church or on the street. And everyone who heard Him praised what He did and said.

16. He also made His way to His hometown of Nazareth, and as His boyhood habit had been, He attended church on the Sabbath day with the rest of the

people. Now on this particular Sabbath, He was asked to give the Scripture reading.

17. The scheduled reading for the day was from Isaiah the prophet. And when they handed Him the scroll, He unrolled it and found the place where it said,

18. "The Spirit's power is with me because He has chosen me to preach good news to those who are poor, to heal those with broken hearts, to deliver those who are prisoners of sin, to give sight to those who can't see, to set people free from their heavy burdens,

19. and to announce that this is the year of the Lord."

20. When He finished, He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the minister in charge, and sat down. And everyone in the church sat there spellbound by the meaning He gave to the words of the prophet by the way He read them.

21. Then He said, "This Scripture is being fulfilled before your very eyes, and what you heard is true."

22. Now everyone there agreed with what He said and marvelled at His gracious, winning ways and how well He spoke. Then some of them said, "But isn't this Joseph's son, the man who had a carpenter shop just down the street? How then can this young man say all these things about Himself?"

23. Again Jesus spoke up and said, "I know what you're thinking. And I know that you're ready to quote the proverb to me which says, 'Physician, demonstrate your skills on yourself and your family first.' In other words, you'd like me to work some miracles here at home first before you would trust me and accept what I say about myself."

24. Then He paused for a moment and, with sadness in His voice, said, "No prophet is first accepted in his own country.

25. And this seems to be especially true in Israel. For instance, in the days of Elijah when it hadn't rained for three years and six months and the drought had spread throughout the country, there were many widows living in Israel.

26. But God didn't send Elijah to any of

them, because their hearts were so insensitive to the Holy Spirit that they couldn't believe the simplest statement of Scripture or the simple word of a prophet. So He sent him to stay with a non-Israelite widow woman living in Zarephath of Sidon.

27. And in the days of Elisha there were numerous lepers in Israel, but he healed none of them except Naaman the Syrian who believed what he said."

28. When the people heard that He thought non-Israelites had more faith than they had, they took it as a gross insult and instantly turned against Him.

29. With tempers flaring, they stood to their feet, shouted at Him, grabbed Him, dragged Him out of the synagogue, and shoved Him through the streets to the outskirts of the city and to a nearby cliff, determined to push Him over the edge.

30. But when they got there, He suddenly stopped, freed Himself from their grip, turned around, and quietly walked through the crowd and away from the city.

31. From Nazareth Jesus went to Capernaum which was also located in Galilee, and there, too, He attended Sabbath services and read the Scripture and commented on it as He was asked to.

32. And when the people there listened to Him, they marvelled at His kindly manner of teaching, at what He said, and at the certainty in the tone of His voice.

33. Now on this particular Sabbath, there was a man attending the services who was demon possessed. And as Jesus was commenting on the Scripture He had just read, this man suddenly cried out, saying,

34. "Leave us alone! What do we have to do with you? Have you come here to kill us? We know who you are! You're Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy One born of God!"

35. This disrupted the whole service. So Jesus decided to stop the man's shouting and spoke to the demon possessing him: "Stop shouting and come out of him!" After a severe struggle with the man now lying on the floor, the demon came out of him without hurting him.

36. At first everyone was awestruck. When finally they found their voices, they

said to each other, "What power this man has! He speaks to the demons with authority, tells them to leave, and they do!"

37. So Jesus' fame quickly spread throughout that whole section of Galilee.

38. After the services that morning, He and His disciples made their way to Simon Peter's house where they were invited to come for dinner. When they got there, they found Peter's mother-in-law in bed with a very high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her.

39. So He went to her bedside and, looking at her, rebuked the fever, and it immediately left her. Then she got up and began preparing a meal for them.

40. Later that day, after the sun had set, all kinds of sick people besieged Peter's house. Some were even being helped along by their relatives and friends. Jesus laid His hands on them, and everyone who came was healed.

41. Many of these people were demon possessed, and as He cast the demons out, they would shout, "Yes! You are the Son of God!" When He would tell them to stop shouting, they obeyed Him and stopped because they knew who He was.

42. This went on until late into the night. After a few hours of sleep, just before daybreak, Jesus got up and made His way out of town to an isolated spot where He could be alone to pray. When morning came, people found Him and begged Him to stay and not leave to go to another town.

43. He answered them and said, "As much as I would like to, I can't stay. I have to take the good news of God's kingdom to other places, too, because that's what God has asked me to do."

44. So He left Capernaum, but He continued to teach and preach in many synagogues throughout Galilee.

CHAPTER 5

1. One day it so happened that Jesus was teaching by the Lake of Galilee near the Plain of Gennesaret and the crowds got so big and the people so close, that He almost got pushed into the lake.

2. That's when He noticed two empty fishing boats floating nearby and the fish-

ermen rinsing out their nets as they stood in the shallow water next to them.

3. So He picked the boat belonging to Simon Peter, got in, and asked His disciples to push Him a little way off shore. Then He sat down and, from the little fishing boat, continued to teach the people.

4. After He finished speaking, He turned to Simon Peter and said, "Push out a little farther where the water is deep and then throw out your nets for a catch."

5. Peter answered and said, "Master, we fished all night long last night and didn't catch a thing. And you want us to throw out the nets now? This is the wrong time to do this because the fish go to the deeper cooler waters during the heat of the day. But if you say so, we'll do it."

6. And when they had thrown out the nets, they caught such a large number of fish that when they tried to pull them in, their nets started to break.

7. So they shouted to their partners in the nearby boats to come help them. Soon after they rowed over to help, both boats were so loaded with fish that they nearly sank.

8. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell on his knees in front of Jesus and said, "O Lord, I'm a sinful man! Why do you even come near me?"

9. He said this because he and all the others in the boat were awestruck at this miraculous catch of fish.

10. James and John, the sons of Zebedee who were in the other boat, were as awestruck as he was. Then Jesus said to Peter, "Don't be so amazed at this catch of fish; from now on you'll be fishing for men."

11. When they got back to shore, they left their boats, their nets, and the large catch of fish with the hired help and followed Jesus.

12. Now there were other miracles that Jesus did. For instance, it happened that in a certain city a man full of leprosy saw Jesus, recognized Him, and, covering his face, came and fell on his knees in front of Him and said, "Lord, if you want to, I know you can heal me and make me clean."

13. Jesus reached out, touched him, and said, "Of course I want to help you. Be

healed and be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him.

14. Then Jesus told him not to broadcast the news that he was healed until after he had shown himself to the priest who would officially pronounce him clean. Also, he should first bring an offering for a public testimony of wellness as specified in the law of Moses.

15. But he told everyone he met what happened before he showed himself to the priests. So when the word got out about what Jesus had done, He immediately became the center of hatred of the priests for supposedly ignoring the law of Moses, as well as being the center of attraction of the people who came to Him to be healed.

16. So He had to leave the area and go to a desolate place to have some privacy and time for prayer.

17. Another time, as Jesus was talking with some of the Pharisees and theology professors who had come to see Him from various places in Galilee and Judea and even from Jerusalem, the stage seemed to be set for still another miracle.

18. Now the house where this meeting took place was surrounded by crowds of people trying to get a glimpse of the dignitaries and to hear what the discussion was all about. And some men came along carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They told the people that they wanted to see Jesus so He could heal their friend. But the people figured that there was no hurry, so they wouldn't budge.

19. Since the men couldn't get through the crowd, they decided to go around to the back of the house, hoist themselves up to the flat roof, and then use ropes to pull their friend on the stretcher up behind them. Once on top, they carefully lifted the material covering the roof and lowered the stretcher right down in front of Jesus.

20. When Jesus saw the concern these men had for their friend and the confidence they had that He would heal him, He looked at the man on the stretcher and said, "My friend, your confession has been heard and your sins are forgiven."

21. And when Jesus said that, the Pharisees said to themselves, "That's blasphemy!

Nobody can forgive sins except God!"

22. Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to them, "What are you thinking about so seriously? Are you upset by what I just said?

23. Let me ask you a question, Which requires more power, to say, 'I forgive you your sins,' or, 'I heal you, so stand up and walk'?

24. But to let you know that God has given me power to forgive sins, I will heal this man of his paralysis." Then turning to the paralytic He said, "Stand up, pick up your stretcher, and go home."

25. Instantly the man got off the stretcher, stood up, picked up his stretcher, and walked out the door and through the crowd, praising God.

26. And everyone who saw what happened was stunned. When they finally found their tongues, they too praised and glorified God. Filled with joy and awe, they said to each other and everyone they met, "Today we've seen the most incredible thing happen that anyone has ever seen!"

27. After this Jesus went on His way, and as He was going through town, He saw a Jewish tax collector whose name was Levi Matthew sitting at his tax table in the marketplace collecting taxes for the Romans and setting it high enough to have a good percentage left over for himself. Jesus stopped, looked at him, and said, "Come, follow me."

28. Immediately Matthew got up, left his tax booth, and followed Jesus.

29. Later Matthew invited Jesus over to his house for dinner to which he also invited a large number of other tax collectors and special friends of his.

30. The next day when the Pharisees and the teachers of the law heard about it, they complained to Jesus' disciples, saying, "Why do you men eat and drink with tax collectors and other such societal rejects?"

31. Jesus overheard it, and answering their question, said, "People who are well don't need a physician, only people who are sick.

32. So my mission is not so much to call good people to repentance, but sinners."

33. And they challenged Him and said, "But look at the disciples of John. They're always fasting or praying, trying to live more righteously. But all your disciples do is accept invitations to dinner parties!"

34. Jesus let them talk themselves out and then said to them, "Have you ever heard of groomsmen fasting in the presence of the bridegroom?

35. There is a time to fast and to pray and that time will come for my disciples, too, but only after the bridegroom is gone."

36. Then He shared with them some lessons from life and said, "Nobody mends an old rotting garment with strong new patches of cloth because the old garment won't be able to stand the strain and will soon tear again. Besides, everyone will see that the new patch will not match the old.

37. And nobody puts fresh grape juice into a dried-out leather container because the old container won't be able to take the pressure of the liquid and will split open. Then the grape juice will be lost, and the bottle will be useless.

38. But fresh juice needs to be put into new flexible bottles. Then both the juice and the bottles will be preserved.

39. Now it's also true that people accustomed to drinking old wine don't suddenly enjoy the taste of new wine. At first they'll be skeptical and insist that the old wine is better, but afterward they change their minds."

CHAPTER 6

1. A few weeks later on the second Sabbath when Jesus was still in the area, He and His disciples were passing through a wheat field on their way to the synagogue. As they went along, they started picking heads of wheat, rubbing them in their hands to free the kernels, and eating them for their breakfast.

2. Some Pharisees who were also on their way to the synagogue saw it, stopped, and said to them, "Why are you harvesting on the Sabbath? Don't you know it's against the law?"

3. Jesus spoke up and said, "Haven't you men read what David and those who were with him did when they were hungry?"

4. They went into the sanctuary, and the priest gave them the ceremonial bread to eat to satisfy their hunger. And this was contrary to Scripture because no one is supposed to eat the ceremonial bread except the priests."

5. Then He added, "And the Son of Man knows what is right to do on the Sabbath because He's in charge of it."

6. The next Sabbath the local elders invited Him to teach. There was a man in the congregation with a shriveled arm.

7. The scribes and Pharisees knew this and were sitting there just waiting to see if Jesus would heal this man on the Sabbath so they could accuse Him of breaking the law by practicing medicine.

8. Jesus knew what they were thinking, but in spite of this, He looked at the man with the shriveled arm and said to him, "Please, stand up for me." And the man stood up.

9. Then Jesus turned to the scribes and Pharisees and said, "I want to ask you a question or two. Is it right to do good works on the Sabbath or not? Would doing good things on the Sabbath be evil? Which is better, to heal a person or to let him die?"

10. After looking around and waiting for an answer, He turned back to the man and said, "Stretch out your shriveled arm." And as the man attempted to do so, he found he could do it because in the process his shriveled arm was made whole.

11. And the scribes and Pharisees were angry and got up and went outside to consult together on what to do next.

12. After this, Jesus and His disciples went into the hill country to find a quiet place to pray. There Jesus prayed all night, communing with God until His whole being was re-energized.

13. When daybreak came, He called together His disciples--there were twelve of them--and appointed them to be His apostles.

14. Simon Peter was one of them, as was Andrew his brother. Also among them were the two Zebedee brothers, James and John. The others were Philip, Bartholomew,

15. Matthew, Thomas, James the son of

Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot,

16. Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who was the traitor.

17. After Jesus had commissioned them, they made their way down from the hill country into the flat area below. Soon they were surrounded by huge crowds of people who had come there from Judea, Jerusalem, and as far away as Tyre and Sidon on the coast, to hear Jesus. Many of them wanted to be healed.

18. Among them were those who were demon possessed. They too wanted to be healed, and they were.

19. Many of the people believed that if they just touched Him, they would be healed, and they too were healed. In fact, by the time the day was nearly over, there was not a sick person left in the whole crowd.

20. Then Jesus found a little knoll where He made Himself comfortable, and looking at His disciples, He said to them, "Happiness doesn't come from being rich. You can be poor and be happy because God's whole kingdom belongs to you.

21. Happiness means focusing on the future. You may suffer from hunger, but there will come a time when you'll have all you can eat. Happiness is more than wiping away present tears because the time will come when your life will be a life of constant laughter.

22. Happiness can even come out of situations where men don't want to associate with you, insult you, reject you, hate you, and falsely accuse you before authorities because of me.

23. When that happens to you, don't be sad, because heaven knows all about it and is ready to reward you for it. And what you'll go through for me will be no different from what the prophets went through, because the people back then treated them the same way.

24. I feel sorry for those who want nothing else but to be rich, because that's all they'll ever have. So they'll have to be satisfied with the happiness they get from their riches.

25. I feel sorry for those whose life is one round of gaiety and partying. They have their happiness now because that's

all they really want. However, the day will come when they'll feel sick over what they thought would make them happy, but all their tears will not be able to change things.

26. I Also feel sorry for people whose only purpose in life is to be well thought of. Unfortunately, that's the same kind of public approval and happiness that motivates false prophets.

27. Let me tell you about real happiness. Love your enemies, do something good for those who don't like you,

28. say something good about those who curse you, and pray for those who exploit you and use you to further their own interests.

29. And if anyone slaps your face, don't hit him back, but let him slap you on the other cheek if you have to. Have the same attitude toward those who rob you; don't fight them because you might get hurt, too. If they want your coat, let them have it. And if they want your shirt, let them have that, too.

30. Give something to everyone who asks you for help. If someone borrows something from you and you keep reminding him to return it but he keeps forgetting, let him have it.

31. Treat everyone kindly, just as you want people to treat you.

32. If you care only about those who care about you, what's so different about that? Thieves and gang members care about each other, too.

33. If you care only about those who care about you, do you expect to be rewarded for that? Sinners do the same thing.

34. And if you loan money, tools, or other things only to those from whom you expect some kind of return, what's so great about that? Evil politicians do that all the time.

35. But show you care about your enemies and those who don't like you by doing nice things for them. Be good to strangers and to those you've never seen. So when you do something for someone, whether you're loaning them something or doing them a favor, don't do it to get something back from them. Just remember that eventually you'll be rewarded because you're

the children of God and you're showing the same love that God has for people. He is kind and gracious even to the most ungrateful and wicked.

36. Be gracious and kind as your heavenly Father is.

37. Don't be judgmental and don't condemn people for what they've done to you because God doesn't condemn you for the hurts you have caused Him. He forgives you. Treat others the same way.

38. Have a giving attitude in all you do and you'll find that you can't outgive yourself because you'll get back more than you gave. God will return it to you in blessings through a variety of ways, and the return will be abundant. The blessings will be packed in, and your cup will run over. That's how God does things.

39. Can blind people lead blind people? Won't they both fall into the ditch? Why then follow someone who doesn't know where he's going or what he's doing?

40. You see, discipleship means learning to be like your Teacher and not going contrary to what He taught you.

41. And don't look for faults in your brother's life. What will happen is, you'll be so concerned with the specks of inconsistencies you see there that you'll miss seeing the changes you need to make in your own life.

42. When that happens, how can you go to him and say, 'Brother, let me help you change your life,' when you don't change your own? That's being hypocritical, because what you're saying to him is, 'Don't do as I do, but do as I say.' You need to change your own life first, and then you'll be able to get close to your brother to help him make changes in his life.

43. Healthy trees will always produce good fruits, while sickly trees will produce sickly fruit.

44. So every tree is known by the kind of fruit it produces. You don't go up to a thorn bush expecting to pick figs or up to a bramble bush to pick grapes.

45. A good man, out of the goodness that's in his heart, will do good things, while a bad person out of the badness that's in his heart, will do bad things. Every-

thing we say and do results from the feelings we have in our hearts.

46. And be honest with yourselves. If you call me Lord, then listen to what I have to say.

47. Anyone who comes to me to listen to what I have to say and then follows my instructions is like a man who builds a house.

48. First of all, he digs deep into the soil to make sure the footings of the house will be on solid rock. Then, when the house is finished and the floods come and the waters surge around the house, it will stand because he built it on solid rock.

49. But the person who comes to me to listen to what I have to say and then ignores it, he's like a man who builds a house without laying a solid foundation. And when the floods come and the waters surge around the house, it will be washed away because it was not built on solid rock."

CHAPTER 7

1. **After** Jesus finished talking to His disciples and to the people, He decided to go from there to Capernaum.

2. Now, a Roman officer's slave, one who served him at home and was like one of the family, became terribly sick and within a short time was at the point of death.

3. When the officer heard about Jesus' power to heal, he asked some of the Jewish religious leaders to ask Him to come and heal his servant.

4. They agreed and went to Jesus and without hesitation said, "There is a Roman officer who needs your help, and he deserves all the help you can give him

5. because he loves the Jewish people. In fact, he loves our whole nation and has built a synagogue for us right here in town."

6. So Jesus followed the Jewish leaders to the officer's house. When they were making little progress because of the crowd, the officer sent Jesus this message, "Lord, I wish you wouldn't trouble yourself to come to my house because I don't feel worthy to have you come.

7. That's the same reason why I didn't come to see you but asked others to speak

for me. All you really have to do is to command the sickness to go away, and it will, and my servant will be healed.

8. I know how the chain of command works because I'm an officer and have soldiers under me who recognize my authority. All I have to do is command a soldier to go, and he goes, and another to come, and he comes, and to command my trusted servant to do this or to do that, and he does it."

9. When Jesus heard this, He was surprised at this Roman's faith in Him and turned to the people, and to the religious leaders standing nearby who heard this, and said, "I want to tell you, I haven't found a Jew with this kind of faith anywhere in Israel!"

10. Then Jesus said to the messenger, "Tell your master that because he has believed, it will be done." Then the messenger returned home and when he got to the house, the servant was healed.

11. Later, Jesus made His way to the little city of Nain accompanied by many of His followers and a large crowd of people.

12. As He approached the city gate, a funeral procession was on its way out. A widow's only son had died and a large crowd made up of relatives, friends, and sympathetic townspeople were following the coffin.

13. Jesus stepped aside to let them by, and as the weeping mother passed Him, His heart went out in compassion for her. So He stopped her, and as she turned to look up at Him, He said, "Don't cry."

14. Then He walked over to the open coffin, touched it, and said, "Young man, I command you to arise!"

15. And the young man opened his eyes, sat up, and began to talk. And Jesus gave him back to his mother.

16. The people were dumb with amazement. When they found their tongues, they praised God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen and has come to visit us. God has not forgotten His people."

17. And the news of what Jesus did spread throughout Judea and all the regions around Israel.

18. This news concerning Jesus was also shared with John the Baptist by his

disciples while he was in prison.

19. Then John sent two of them to Jesus with the question: "Are you the One that should come to save us, or should we look for someone else?"

20. So when the two of them came to Jesus, they said to Him, "John the Baptist sent us to ask you whether or not you are the One who will save Israel or if the real Deliverer will come later."

21. Jesus said nothing, but responded to their questions by healing people of all sorts of diseases, physical problems, demon possessions, and even blindness.

22. Finally, near the end of a long day of healing and teaching, He turned to the two disciples of John who had been watching all this and said, "Go back and tell John what you saw and heard. Tell him that the blind can now see, the lame can walk, the lepers are clean, the deaf can hear, the dead are raised, and the good news about God is being spread everywhere.

23. Also tell him that his doubts will disappear and happiness and confidence will spring up from within him if he accepts me for who I am."

24. Then after John's disciples left, Jesus turned to the people and said, "When John was preaching in those desolate areas outside of Jerusalem, why did you go out to see him? What did you expect to see out there? A blade of grass blowing in the wind?

25. Why did you go all the way out there to see him? Did you expect to see a man modeling the latest fashion? You know that those who wear fashionable clothes live in comfort, not in desolate places as John did.

26. Then why did you go all the way out there to see him? What did you expect to see? Wasn't it to see and hear a prophet? Of course it was! And I want to tell you that you saw more than just an ordinary prophet.

27. You saw the man of whom the Lord through Malachi said, 'I will send a special messenger to the people before I come.'

28. So I want to tell you that John is this special messenger. And in this role he is greater and more important than any

prophet who ever lived. And yet any one who has the privilege of seeing the kingdom of God in action is more privileged than John in prison."

29. And everyone who had heard John preach and had been baptized by him, praised God for him, including the tax collectors.

30. But the Pharisees and canon lawyers rejected John's preaching, which was often directed against their abuses, and they decided not to be baptized.

31. Then Jesus said, "What should I compare the people of this generation to, and what are they like?

32. They are like two groups of children in the park trying to play together. After a while one group said to the other group, 'We pretended we were playing wedding and sang happy songs for you, but you refused to dance. Then we pretended we were playing funeral and sang sad songs for you, but you refused to cry. We don't know what you want.'

33. So here comes John the Baptist. He lives in the desolate regions around Jerusalem, fasts, prays, and doesn't drink, and some of you say, 'Hey, that man's demon possessed!'

34. Then another prophet comes along, and He eats and drinks with anyone who invites Him, and some of you say, 'Look at that gluttonous, wine-drinking prophet! How can He make the claims He does if He associates and eats with tax collectors and other rejects in our society?'

35. However, in spite of this, He will be recognized as a prophet by everyone who looks for truth."

36. Now one of the Pharisees who had been following Jesus openly, invited Him to dinner, and Jesus accepted. So, together with His disciples, He went to the Pharisee's house, and soon they were all reclining on small dinner couches.

37. While they were eating, a woman prostitute from town who had heard where Jesus was came in with a jar of the most expensive perfume.

38. She came in and quietly made her way to where Jesus was reclining like the other guests with His feet away from the table. Then she knelt down, gently took

His feet in her hands, kissed them, and wet them with her tears. When she finished crying, she dried them with her hair, opened the little jar, and carefully poured this expensive perfume on His feet.

39. By now everyone had stopped eating and was watching her. When the host saw all this, he was upset and thought to himself, 'How can this man be a prophet, much less the Messiah? If He were the Man He claims to be, He would know that she's a prostitute and wouldn't let her near Him.'

40. Jesus knew what His host was thinking and quietly spoke to him so as not to embarrass him in front of his guests. "Simon, I would like to ask you a question." The Pharisee said, "Go ahead, Teacher, ask it."

41. Jesus said, "There were two people who owed a rich man some money. The one owed him the equivalent of five hundred days of salary and the other one owed him fifty days of salary.

42. And when neither one of them had any way of paying off the loan, the man generously cancelled both debts. Tell me, which one of these two men do you think would show the greatest appreciation?"

43. Simon answered and said, "I suppose the man who had the largest debt." Jesus said, "You're right."

44. Then He looked toward the woman who was now sitting at His feet and said to Simon, "Have you noticed how hospitable this woman has been to me? When I came here, there were no servants waiting to offer us a basin of water with a towel to rinse and dry our dusty feet, which is the generally accepted custom in a land where people walk in sandals. But this woman noticed how dusty my feet were and has rinsed them with her tears and dried them with her hair.

45. In fact, when I came, you forgot to give me the customary hug and kiss that all Jewish brothers give each other. But this woman didn't hesitate to hug and kiss my feet.

46. You even forgot to offer me the ordinary perfume people put on the heads of their house guests, but she has used the most expensive perfume on my feet.

47. So even though she's known as a prostitute, some time ago she asked me for forgiveness, and I forgave her. And, as you can see, she realizes the depth of sin and appreciates having been forgiven and overflows with gratitude. But those who don't realize the depth of sin and don't appreciate being forgiven express little gratitude."

48. Then Jesus looked directly at the woman and said to her, "Don't be concerned. Your sins are forgiven and I'm not ashamed of you."

49. The others heard and whispered to each other, "Does this man claim to forgive sins?"

50. Then Jesus said to the woman so everyone could hear, "Your faith in me is what has saved you. May the peace of God go with you."

CHAPTER 8

1. **Following** this experience, Jesus made His way through every city and village in the area, preaching and sharing the glad news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve disciples went with Him wherever He went.

2. There were also some women who followed Him, some of whom He had healed or freed from demon possession, like Mary Magdalene whom He freed seven times from demons.

3. And there was Joanna, who was the wife of Chuza, an officer in King Herod's court. Also Susanna and many others who used their resources to help Jesus and His disciples.

4. In one place, a huge crowd of people came together from a number of surrounding towns to where Jesus was. When He saw how eager they were to hear what He had to say, He started teaching them by parables, using illustrations from nature. Looking at a nearby hill where men were sowing, He said to the people,

5. "Once a sower went out to his field to sow. And while he was throwing out his seed, some of it fell on the nearby road, and travelers came along and stepped on the seed, and then birds came and ate up the rest.

6. Some of the seed fell on rocky areas

in the field. It was the first seed to spring up, but it didn't last long because it didn't have enough good soil for moisture.

7. Other seed fell under thorn bushes growing on the edge of the field. When it sprang up, the bushes choked it so it couldn't grow.

8. But there was plenty of seed that fell on good, rich soil. And when it sprang up, it bore much fruit." Then He called out so everyone could hear, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear what I'm saying!"

9. Later His disciples asked Him, "Lord, what were you trying to teach us with this parable?"

10. He answered and said, "I'll explain the meaning to you because I want to make sure you understand what the kingdom of God is all about. But publicly I'll continue to teach in parables so that those who are listening can't pick up something I say to use against me. People of this kind are blind by their own choice, and they'll not understand the parables anyway. But those who really want to know what I'm saying will sooner or later understand them.

11. Now the meaning of the parable of the sower is this: The seed being sown is the word of God, the good news of salvation.

12. The road represents the hearts of those people who gladly listen to the good news, but as soon as they do, the devil comes and captures their interest with other things. And so he takes the seed of the word out of their hearts before they have a chance to repent and be saved.

13. The rocky places in the field are the hearts of those people who not only listen to the good news, but also love it and immediately take hold of it. But then they don't root the word deep into their hearts, and when they're tempted and troubles come, they give up.

14. And the thorny places represent the hearts of those people who gladly listen to the good news, put down their roots, but soon their love of the truth is choked off. The cares of this life, its money-making opportunities, and its immediate happiness choke out the time needed to grow spiritually and to share the good news with

others. And so they dry up.

15. Now the good soil represents the hearts of those who gladly listen, who root their life into the soil of the word, and who continue to love the truth. Consequently, these people produce a great harvest of good things both in their own lives and in the lives of others.

16. You see, nobody who lights a candle covers it up or hides it, but he puts it on a candlestick and holds it up high so that others too can see their way.

17. And let me say this: Nothing you do is a secret. Your heavenly Father knows everything, and everything you do for Him will be shared with the universe. You can't hide a thing that will not eventually be made known, because the angels and other beings in the universe will have to be satisfied with what they decide about you.

18. So I want you to realize that you are held accountable for what you see and hear. And whoever shares what he's seen and heard will be happy and will be entrusted with more light and understanding, but the person who doesn't share what he's seen and heard will actually lose what he has because it will slowly disappear from his own heart."

19. Now it was about this time that Jesus' mother and step-brothers arrived, but they couldn't get near the house where Jesus was because of the crowd. People were so tightly packed together waiting for Him to come out that it was impossible to get near the place.

20. Finally someone passed on the word to Jesus that His mother and step-brothers were there and that they wanted to see Him.

21. Jesus turned to the man who gave Him the message and spoke loudly enough for others nearby to hear, "I'm related to anyone who listens to the word of God. They are the ones who make up my family, and they are as dear to me as my own mother and my own brothers."

22. Now it happened one day that Jesus got into a fishing boat, and He asked His disciples to take Him to the other shore. So they pushed off.

23. After they had rowed out a little way, they set the sail, and Jesus lay down

in the back of the boat and fell asleep. Suddenly a gale-force wind swept down the mountains, and instantly they were in the middle of a storm. The waves picked up and smashed into the little boat which was fast filling with water. It was such a bad storm that it looked as if this could be the end for all of them.

24. The disciples couldn't believe that Jesus was sleeping through all of this. Finally they shook Him awake and said, "Master! Master! Don't you care what happens to us? How can you keep on sleeping?" Calmly Jesus got up, steadied Himself, and quietly told the wind and the waves to stop. Instantly everything was quiet. It was as peaceful as if nothing had happened.

25. Then He turned to them and said, "Where is your faith and trust in God?" They were all afraid and whispered to each other, "Is He human? This is incredible! He tells the wind and the waves to stop and be quiet, and they listen to Him!"

26. After this miraculous escape, they finally reached the other shore which was the province of Gadarenes, just across the lake from Galilee.

27. As they stepped out of the boat, a madman who had once lived in the nearby town came rushing toward them. But for some time now the demons had possessed him and he had been living naked in tombs dug into the nearby hills.

28. As the man came running down the hill, the disciples turned and ran back to the boat, but Jesus stood still and waited for him to come. When the man came within arm's length of Jesus, he suddenly stopped, fell on his knees, and shouted as loudly as he could, "What do we have to do with one another? You're Jesus the Son of the Most High God! I beg you not to torture me!"

29. The reason the man said what he did was that Jesus had commanded him to stop as he came charging down the hill. Before this, the demon had been able to make the whole area afraid of the man. When the authorities would catch him and tie him with chains, he would go into a rage, break the chains, and run back to the tombs.

30. But Jesus stood there unafraid and asked the demon, "What's your name?" It said, "Legion," meaning many-of-us.

31. As the spokesman, the demon asked Jesus not to command them to go back where they came from.

32. It begged Jesus to let them go into a nearby herd of swine feeding on the mountainside. Jesus agreed and gave them permission.

33. Then the demons came out of the man and rushed into the pigs. Suddenly all of them took off and ran madly down the hill and straight into the lake where they all drowned.

34. Now when the herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran back to town to tell their Jewish masters about it. And on the way, they told everyone else they met what had happened.

35. So the owners came out to see for themselves what had taken place. When they got there, they saw the madman properly dressed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, free from demons, and once more in his right mind. Seeing this, they were afraid of what Jesus might do next.

36. Now the herdsmen who had run back to town telling everyone what had happened also told them who had done it.

37. And soon it seemed like every last person living in the region came out to see Jesus. As frightened as they were of His powers, they asked Him to leave. So with His disciples, He started on down the hill to their fishing boat to cross back over the lake.

38. As Jesus was leaving, the man who had been healed begged Jesus to take him along. But Jesus said to him,

39. "Go back to your family and friends and tell them what great things God has done for you." The man obeyed and shared the news not only with his family, but spread it all across town telling everyone he met what great things Jesus had done for him.

40. **When** Jesus arrived back at the other shore, crowds of people were waiting to see Him and gladly welcomed Him back.

41. Now a man called Jairus, who was a leader in the local synagogue, forced his way through the crowd and knelt down in

front of Jesus and begged Him to come to his house.

42. This man had an only daughter who was about twelve years old and about to die. As Jesus tried to make His way to Jairus' house, the crowds pushed in on him and made it almost impossible for Him to move.

43. Lost in the crowd was a woman who had been menstruating for twelve years. She had spent all her money on doctors, but no one could cure her.

44. She squeezed through the crowd, getting closer and closer to Jesus. Finally, as she came up behind Him, she reached out and touched the edge of His robe. Instantly her bleeding stopped. At that moment she knew she was healed because she felt it in her body.

45. Then suddenly Jesus stopped, looked around, and said, "Who touched me?" Everyone nearby denied having touched Him. Then Peter said, "Master, everyone is pushing and shoving to get close to you. How can you ask, 'Who touched me?'"

46. Jesus looked at Peter and said, "Somebody touched me to be healed. I felt power go out of me."

47. When the woman realized that she couldn't hide what she had done, she squeezed through the edge of the crowd, and shaking with fright, she fell on her knees in front of Jesus and told Him that she was the one who had touched Him to be healed. She also told Him why she had touched Him and that she knew she was healed.

48. Jesus said to her, "Don't be afraid. It was your touch of faith that has made you whole. Go in peace, and may the blessing of God be with you."

49. While He was still talking to this woman, a messenger from Jairus' house pressed through the crowd and whispered in his master's ear, "They don't want you to bother Jesus anymore because your daughter is dead."

50. But Jesus knew what had happened, so He turned to the father and said, "Don't give up hope. Just keep on believing and she'll be made well."

51. When they finally arrived at the

house, Jesus went inside but let no one else go in with Him except Peter, James, and John, and the child's father and mother.

52. Everyone in the house was crying and mourning in sorrow for the child. Then Jesus said, "Don't cry. The child isn't dead--she's just sleeping."

53. They all laughed at Him because they knew she was dead.

54. But Jesus went to the room where the girl's body was and asked all those there to leave. Then He took the little girl's hand and said to her, "My child, it's time to get up."

55. Immediately life returned to her body. She opened her eyes, sat up, and looked around. Jesus then asked the parents to give her something to eat.

56. The parents stood there astounded and speechless. Jesus also told them not to broadcast it by telling everyone what had just happened.

CHAPTER 9

1. After this, Jesus called together the twelve disciples and gave them power to heal all kinds of diseases, including authority over demons.

2. Then He sent them out to preach the good news about the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

3. Before they left, He said to them, "Don't make any special preparations. Just go as you are. Don't take anything with you--no food, no beggar's pouch, no money, no extra robe, and not even a walking stick to defend yourself with.

4. People will invite you, and when they do, stay with them until your work is done and you're ready to leave town.

5. If no one welcomes you, leave that town, and when you've reached the city limits, shake the dust off your sandals as a sign to them that they've had a chance to hear the gospel but showed no interest. Then go on to the next town."

6. So the disciples left and visited all the towns in that area, preaching the gospel and healing people of all sorts of diseases.

7. Now when Herod, the ruler of Galilee, heard all the reports about Jesus and what He had done, he was troubled.

Some people had told him that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead.

8. Others told him that Jesus was Elijah come back to earth. And still others told him that Jesus was one of the old prophets come to life.

9. Herod tried to reassure himself that Jesus was not John the Baptist by telling himself, "I beheaded John the Baptist, so he's dead. That's why this man couldn't be John." Yet Herod couldn't get Jesus out of his mind because he kept hearing reports about all the things Jesus was doing, making him all the more eager to see Him.

10. In the meanwhile, the disciples came back and told Jesus all the things they had done through His name. Then Jesus led them to a quiet place in the desert not too far from the little town of Bethsaida to be alone.

11. But the people followed them, and when they found Jesus and His disciples, He welcomed them, taught them about the kingdom of God, and healed as many as needed to be healed.

12. Finally, late in the afternoon, the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Master, these people are hungry. You need to send them on their way so they can get to some nearby town to buy some food before it gets dark because it's a long way back."

13. Jesus looked at His disciples and said, "If the people are hungry, why don't you feed them so they will be able to make it back home?" They said to Him, "We have only five small loaves of bread and two small fish to feed thirteen of us; you don't expect us to go to town to buy food for all these people?"

14. Now there were about five thousand men there, not counting the women and children. Then Jesus said to the disciples, "Go and make the people sit down in little groups of fifty."

15. They did what Jesus asked them to do, and soon all the people were seated.

16. Then Jesus took the five little loaves of bread and the two small fish, looked up to heaven, said the blessing, and started passing bread and fish to the disciples who in turn passed these out to the people.

17. Everyone there had enough to eat, and when they were all done, the disciples

went around to pick up what was left and filled twelve baskets full of bread and fish.

18. Then the people went back home and once again Jesus and the disciples were alone to meditate and pray. One day Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people think I am?"

19. They said, "Some think you're John the Baptist, others think you're Elijah, and still others think you're one of the ancient prophets risen from the dead."

20. Then He asked them, "But who do you think I am?" Peter spoke up and said, "We believe that you're the Messiah, the Anointed One of God."

21. When they all agreed with Peter, Jesus told them not to broadcast who they thought He was because it would anger the Jewish leaders all the more.

22. Then He tried to prepare His disciples for what was coming and said, "The Messiah will yet have to suffer many things. His own people will reject Him, the leading priests and teachers will be against Him, and the Romans will execute Him. But three days later He will rise from the dead."

23. He also said to them, "If anyone wants to be my disciple, he'll have to forget himself, daily take up his cross, and if need be, die so others can be saved."

24. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the sake of others will save it.

25. What advantage is there if a man gains the whole world and then loses his own soul?

26. Anyone who is ashamed to acknowledge me as his Lord, I will be ashamed of when I come back. And I will come with the glory I had before, with the glory of the Father, and in the glory of all the holy angels.

27. Before long, some of you sitting here will have a preview of that glory so you'll be able to see for yourselves the kind of glory I'm talking about."

28. About eight days later, He took Peter, John, and James with Him up to one of the nearby mountains to be alone and to pray.

29. And while they were there, suddenly His face changed in appearance, and

His robe became dazzling white, as bright as sunlit snow.

30. Suddenly, two men stood next to Him and started talking with Him about His upcoming trial and crucifixion. One of them was Moses and the other was Elijah.

31. They both radiated the glory of heaven and encouraged Jesus to complete His mission and to die in Jerusalem, because through His death many people would be saved.

32. Now this happened while Jesus was praying, and Peter and the other two disciples had fallen asleep, but now they were wide awake and saw Jesus' glory and heard both men talking to Him.

33. Then Moses and Elijah disappeared, and the whole thing was over. After Peter found his voice, he said to Jesus, "Master, this is fantastic! This is a holy place and a good place for us to stay! Why don't we pitch three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah?" Peter was so excited that he didn't know what else to say.

34. While Peter was still chatting away, a huge cloud engulfed them, and they were afraid.

35. Then a voice came from the middle of the cloud and said to them, "This is my very own Son whom I dearly love. Listen to what He tells you."

36. Just as suddenly as the cloud came, it lifted and disappeared, and the disciples found themselves alone again. And they never told anyone what happened until years later.

37. The next day, Jesus and these three disciples headed back down the mountain, and crowds of people were waiting for them.

38. A man from the crowd cried out, "Master, I beg you! Have pity on my son! He's my only boy! And he's demon possessed!"

39. As Jesus came closer, the man said, "The demon makes him scream. It throws him to the ground and makes him foam at the mouth and act like a wild animal. Sometimes he goes into convulsions and has such long seizures that we wonder whether he'll come out of them alive.

40. I asked your disciples to heal him, but they can't. So nothing can be done for him."

41. With compassion Jesus looked at the man and then turned to His disciples and said, "How can you be so weak in faith after you've seen me work so many miracles? That alone should have built up your confidence in what God can do, not to mention the things God has already done through your own ministry." Then He turned back to the father and said, "Your son's condition is not hopeless. I'll heal him. Bring him here."

42. As the father was bringing the boy to Jesus, the demon suddenly threw the boy down and immediately he went into convulsions. Then Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy, and asked the father to take him home.

43. The crowd stood there amazed at the power of God. And while everyone stood there trying to comprehend what Jesus had just done, He turned to His disciples and said,

44. "Don't forget what you just saw and let it sink in, because the Son of Man will soon be arrested and will not use His power to free Himself."

45. But they still didn't understand what He was talking about when He said He would be arrested. Besides, they were so awestruck by His power that they were too afraid to ask Him anything.

46. It was soon after this that the disciples got to arguing among themselves how to measure ministerial success and which one of them was the greatest.

47. Jesus knew what was going on and so He picked up a little child from the crowd, sat on a nearby rock, and held the child in His lap.

48. Then He looked at His disciples and said, "Anyone who loves me and tries to have as sweet a spirit as this particular child has, he is the one who is considered greatest in the sight of heaven, even though he may be the least thought of here on earth."

49. Then John spoke up and asked, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons and exercising the power of God by using your name. We told him to stop.

Because he refused to join us, we assumed that he didn't love you."

50. Jesus answered and said, "You shouldn't have done that, because he who is not opposing me is helping me."

51. **Now** the time had come for Jesus to finish His mission. With firm commitment, He set out for Jerusalem.

52. On the way, He sent some of His disciples ahead of Him to a Samaritan village to let the people know He was coming.

53. But the townspeople didn't want Him to stop there because He was on His way to Jerusalem.

54. When James and John saw their attitude, they were angry and went back to Jesus and said, "Lord, these people don't love you. Why don't you let us call down fire from heaven as Elijah did on Mt. Carmel and wipe this place off the map!"

55. But Jesus rebuked their anger and said, "You don't know what you're asking for. Just look at the kind of spirit you have."

56. God has not sent me here to destroy people, but to save them." So they went on to the next village.

57. On the way, a man stopped Jesus and said to Him, "Lord, I love you and want to follow you wherever you go. I want to be your disciple more than anything else."

58. Jesus answered and said, "Foxes have their own dens and birds have their own nests, but the Son of Man has no place to call His own. Are you sure you want to follow me?"

59. Then Jesus turned to another man standing nearby and said, "How about you being one of my disciples?" The man answered and said, "I'll be glad to, but first let me go attend to my sick father who is on the point of death."

60. Jesus said to him, "Let those who don't care about spreading the gospel take care of the dying, but if you want to be my disciple, you need to put first things first."

61. Then another person said, "Lord, I'll follow you and tell others the good news of the kingdom. All I need to do is to go home and say goodbye to my family and to check with them to make sure I've

made the right decision."

62. Jesus said to him, "No one who decides to follow me and then lets others talk him out of it is fit to be my disciple. No one can put his hand to the plow and keep looking back and hope to plow a straight furrow. He's not fit to spread the good news about the kingdom of God."

CHAPTER 10

1. It was after this that Jesus picked seventy other disciples and sent them out two by two to go ahead of Him into every city and town to where He was about to go.

2. He said to them, "There are many people to be harvested, but there are so few workers to harvest them. As you go out, ask God to inspire others to join you."

3. You'll be like innocent lambs going in among a pack of hungry wolves.

4. But don't worry; don't be concerned about having enough money for food and clothing. You'll be taken care of; you don't even need to carry an extra pair of sandals with you. And don't stand in the marketplace talking with people just to pass the time of day. All this gives the wrong impression about the urgency of your mission. There are not many days left before I die.

5. Now if people invite you to stay with them, be sure to let them know that you are men of peace and not political action.

6. And if your host is a man of peace, he'll insist you stay with him, and you'll both be happy. But if your host is a man in revolt against Rome and you go there to stay, then no matter how peaceful your intentions are, there will be no peace for you in that house.

7. But if the host is a man of peace as he says, stay there as long as you need to, to finish your mission. Don't keep moving from place to place because that'll give people the impression that you're hard to please.

8. And do the same in other towns. Graciously accept the lodging, the food, and the drink they offer you.

9. In turn heal their sick and share with them the good news of the kingdom, tell-

ing them what it has done for you.

10. Now if you get to a town and the people there don't want you to stay and are not interested in what you have to say, then as you leave and someone asks you why you're leaving, don't hesitate to tell them why.

11. Speak kindly and say something like this, 'We're not wanted here, that's why we're leaving. And our footprints in the sand are evidence that we've been here to offer you the blessings of God's kingdom. So now we're shaking the dust off our sandals to show you that we're not responsible for your decision.

12. If that happens, it will be more tolerable in the Day of Judgement for Sodom and Gomorrah than for them.

13. I really feel badly for such cities and towns, especially Khorazin and Bethsaida. They've had the opportunity to know me and accept me because of the many miracles I worked there. If these same miracles were done in Gentile cities like Tyre and Sidon, those people would long ago have repented and turned to God.

14. In fact, people in those cities have a greater possibility of being saved, mainly because of their attitude.

15. And Capernaum is even worse off. It has been my second home. But their local pride stands in their way, and they could care less whether they're saved or not.

16. Remember, if people listen to you, they're really listening to me. And if they reject you, they're really rejecting me; and when they reject me, they're really rejecting Him who sent me."

17. Now when the seventy finished their mission, they came back in great joy and said, "Lord, even the demons obeyed us when we spoke to them in your name."

18. Jesus said, "This is the beginning of Satan's final act that will detach him from the sympathy of the angels forever.

19. Don't forget that even though you have power to cast out demons, they're like snakes and scorpions--ready to kill. But don't be afraid because they won't be allowed to kill you.

20. And don't be tempted to put your trust in your new power, or to take for

granted the life that you have because that will lead you to become overconfident and will eventually lead to your downfall. The thing to do is to rejoice in the privilege you have of helping me and that your names are written in heaven."

21. Then Jesus was filled with joy for them and broke out in prayer, saying, "I thank you, Father. Truly you are the Master of heaven and earth. And in your wisdom you didn't share your power with the brilliant and successful, but with those who are as innocent as little children. Yes, Father, this is the way you always do things, and it's the right way to do it.

22. Father, you have trusted me to use your full power, and that's because you know me as no one else does, and no one else knows you as I do, except those who see you in me."

23. Then He turned to His disciples and said, "How privileged you are to see the things you have.

24. There have been prophets and kings who wanted to see the things you have, but didn't have that privilege. They longed to hear the things you've heard, but didn't have that chance."

25. It was about this time that a certain young lawyer stood up in one of the crowds to test Jesus and said, "Master, what do I have to do to be saved?"

26. Jesus answered and said, "What do the Scriptures say and how do you understand them?"

27. And he said, "The Scriptures say, 'You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your strength, and all your being; then you should love your neighbor as you love yourself.'"

28. Jesus responded and said, "You've interpreted the Scriptures correctly. Do this and then heaven can trust you with eternal life."

29. But the lawyer wanted to justify his lack of such love, so he said, "But, Master, how can I know who my neighbor is?"

30. Then Jesus said, "I have a story to tell you. A certain man left Jerusalem to go down into the valley toward Jericho. While traveling through a rather desolate area of the canyons, he was attacked by a

gang of thieves who beat him up, took his money, stripped him of his clothes, and then left him lying in the desert sun half dead.

31. Now it so happened that a Jewish priest was traveling that same road on his way from Jericho to Jerusalem to serve in his rotation at the Temple. When he came to the place where the injured man was laying and saw what had happened to him, he decided not to touch the man and become ceremonially unclean. So he kept on going.

32. Later a Levite came along the same road. When he came to where the man was, he stopped and looked; but after noticing the man's condition, he decided that a man in his condition wasn't worth the effort. So he went on his way.

33. Then a Samaritan came along, whose people are considered by the Jew to be unclean. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him and decided to help him, even though the man was a Jew.

34. He got off his donkey, took some oil and wine, washed out the man's wounds with the alcohol, and then used the oil to sooth the pain. When he got him awake enough to move, he helped him to get on his donkey and took him as quickly as possible to the next rest stop. There he personally nursed him all through the night.

35. The next morning before he left, he spoke to the manager of the place, gave him the equivalent of two days' wages, and said, "I'd like you to take care of this man until he's well enough to go on. But if it costs more than this, I'll pay you the difference when I stop here the next time."

36. Then Jesus asked the young lawyer, "Which of these three men do you think accepted the robbed man as his neighbor?"

37. The lawyer answered and said, "The one who cared for him and was kind to him." Then Jesus said, "Now you know what it means to be neighborly, because anyone in need is your neighbor."

38. After this, Jesus made His way to Bethany to stay overnight at Martha's house. She had given Him a standing invitation to stop by any time He needed to.

39. Now this woman had a sister whose name was Mary. And whenever Jesus was at their house, Mary couldn't wait to sit at His feet to listen to what He had to say.

40. On this occasion, Martha was extremely rushed trying to get some food together for all these hungry men. When it got to be too much for her, she went to Jesus to complain about her sister who just sat there listening. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, don't you care anything about all the work it takes to feed all of these men? The least you can do is ask my sister to help me."

41. Jesus looked at Martha very understandingly and said, "Martha, Martha, you are so helpful to everyone in need and you're going to great lengths to feed us and to make us comfortable.

42. But sometimes there are more important things than food and comfort. Mary came to me because she needs help. So she did the right thing. This kind of dependence on me will help her the rest of her life."

CHAPTER 11

1. One day Jesus and His disciples went to a certain place to pray. When He had finished praying, one of them said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray as John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray."

2. Jesus said to them, "Let me give you a model prayer. When you pray, pray something like this: 'Holy Father in heaven, may your name be honored in all that we do. May your kingdom come soon. And until it does, may we do your will here as if we were already in heaven.

3. Please take care of us and provide us with our necessities.

4. Forgive us when we fail to honor you and help us to have the same forgiving spirit toward others. And please don't let us have more troubles than we can handle."

5. Then Jesus continued and said, "Let me explain to you what praying is like. Suppose one of you went to your friend's house about midnight, knocked on his door, and then said, 'Friend, do you have three loaves of bread I could borrow?

6. You see, another friend of mine

came to see me unexpectedly, and I'm all out of food.'

7. And your friend will say, 'Do you realize what time of night it is? Why couldn't you wait until morning? My kids are sleeping, and if I get up and go rummaging through the house for bread, I'll wake up the whole family.'

8. Now even though your friend will hesitate to wake up his family to give you what you need, if you keep asking, he'll get up and get the bread because he's your friend. The two of you have such a close relationship that no matter how often you ask, it won't affect your friendship.

9. So don't be afraid to ask for what you need and you'll find that heaven's door will open.

10. For everyone who asks will receive, and he who seeks will find, and to those who knock the door will open.

11. Which of you fathers, if your little son asks you for a piece of bread, would give him a rock? If the boy asks you for a piece of broiled fish, would you give him a snake?

12. Or, if he asks you for a cooked egg, would you give him a scorpion?

13. Now if you who are born in sin know how to give good things to your children, how much more your heavenly Father knows what to give you when you ask Him."

14. Later that day, Jesus healed a man who was mute of demon possession, but after the demon was cast out, the man could talk again. And the people were amazed.

15. But some of them said, "He must be using the power of Satan to do this."

16. Others went so far as to insist that He prove to them that He was doing this by the power of God.

17. Jesus knew what was in their hearts and said to them, "You know as well as I do that if a kingdom continues to be torn apart by civil war, it simply won't last. And, if a family is divided, it won't last either.

18. So, if Satan fights against himself, how long do you think his kingdom would last? The reason I say this is that some of you think that I'm using the power of Satan

to cast out demons.

19. Now if it's true that demons are cast out by the power of Satan, then whose power were the prophets of Israel using when they cast out demons? And whose power do you call on when you want to drive them out?

20. On the other hand, if I'm casting out devils by the power of God, then the kingdom of God is at work right before your eyes.

21. When a strong man guards his own house, everything is safe.

22. But if during the night someone comes along who is stronger, and attacks the owner and defeats him, nothing in the house is safe. Then the stronger one takes what the owner has and walks off with the spoil.

23. So those who are not for me are actually against me because, if they're not willing to speak up for me, they're making it harder for people to accept me.

24. And you who know me, but are not willing to speak up for me, are like a person who was once possessed by a demon. But the demon was restless because he could not find another victim to possess and control. Finally, he said to himself, 'Let me go back to the man I once possessed to see if I can move back into my house.'

25. When he checked the man out, he found his heart to be clean, but empty of any gratitude and positive commitment.

26. So the demon goes out and invites seven of his spirit friends who are worse than he is to come and join him. They accept, and so all eight of them move into this man's heart and make themselves at home. And now the man is worse off than before he knew me."

27. It so happened, as Jesus was talking, that a certain woman in the crowd called out to Him and said, "Blessings be on the womb which carried you and the breasts which nursed you."

28. Jesus responded and said, "More important, blessings be on those who listen to the word of God and then practice it."

29. As the people crowded around Him, Jesus went on to say, "So many in this

generation are hard to convince of anything. They're always looking for some great supernatural sign as evidence to know whether they should believe in me or not. But the things they're looking for won't happen. The miracle that will happen will be similar to the miracle of Jonah.

30. Just as Jonah's resurrection from the sea convinced the Ninevites that he was sent by God, so my resurrection will convince many in this generation that I was sent by God.

31. On the Day of Judgment, the Queen of Sheba will stand as a witness against this generation because she traveled a long way to listen to what Solomon had to say, and now One is here who is wiser than Solomon.

32. On the Day of Judgment, the people of Ninevah will stand as a witness against this generation because when Jonah preached to them, they took it to heart and repented.

33. No one, after he lights a lamp, hides it under a bushel, but he sets it on a lampstand in the center of the house so everyone who comes in can see.

34. Your eyes are like lamps. When you can see, everything is light. But when you can't see, everything is dark. This is also true spiritually.

35. So be careful not to let the little light you have go out, because then you'll find yourself in the dark.

36. On the other hand, if you look for spiritual light, suddenly you'll see it shining all around you. It'll be like a candle that floods you with light."

37. It was about this time that a certain Pharisee asked Jesus home for dinner. Jesus accepted and followed the man to his house.

38. When the Pharisee noticed that Jesus didn't wash as the Pharisees do, he was disappointed, but said nothing.

39. Then Jesus said to him, "I know how careful the Pharisees are about washing their hands and forearms, as well as their cups and plates. But many of them care very little about how clean they are on the inside.

40. How foolish can they be? Didn't the same God who created the outside of

us also create the inside of us?

41. They need to clean the inside of their cup first and then be concerned about cleanliness on the outside. One way to do this is to sincerely give what you have to feed the poor. Then everything you touch will not be unclean.

42. But woe to those Pharisees who tithe the smallest garden herb such as mint, but forget all about loving God and being fair to others. You should pay tithe, but why be so meticulous about the one duty and not the other?

43. Woe to those Pharisees who love to sit in the most prominent seats in the synagogue, and have to have everyone notice them as they move around the market.

44. Woe to those Pharisees because of their hypocrisy. It's like being dead and without feeling. People reach out to them for help and they don't even know it.

45. Then one of the other guests, a young lawyer, spoke up and said, "Master, when you talk about the Pharisees that way, you make us look bad, too."

46. Jesus said to him, "You're right, because there are lawyers who do the same thing. They load people down with so many civil and religious requirements that they can hardly move. And they won't lift a finger to help them. They need to make things easier for people, not harder.

47. Woe to those Pharisees and lawyers who build beautiful memorials to honor the prophets whom their forefathers executed.

48. Their own spirit is no different. By building these memorials without changing their lives, they're approving what their forefathers did and are ready to do the same today.

49. God knew this would happen when He said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some they will execute and others they will persecute.'

50. So the present generation will have to suffer the consequences of what their fathers did,

51. starting with Abel who was killed by his own brother, and on to the time when the prophet Zachariah was murdered in the Temple between the altar and Holy

Place. I want to tell you that there is no way this generation with its present attitude can escape the consequences.

52. Woe to those teachers who take away the people's right to understand the Scriptures. They claim to be experts, but don't understand the Scriptures themselves, and by their attitude they keep others from understanding them."

53. When Jesus finished and left the place, the young lawyer, the teachers, and the Pharisees left with Him. Then they bitterly attacked Him with questions, hoping He would say something under pressure for which they could arrest Him.

54. From then on they acted more like informers than religious leaders, always spying on Him and waiting like vultures to pounce on any evidence they could find against Him.

CHAPTER 12

1. **Meanwhile**, so many people had gathered together to see Jesus that they were almost trampling on each other. So Jesus decided to lead the crowds outside of town to a place where they could spread out. While waiting for the people to settle down, He turned to His disciples and said, "Be careful of the yeast of the Pharisees which can grow in your heart without your knowing it, and soon you, too, will be pretending to serve God while serving yourself.

2. You see, some day everything that is covered up will be uncovered and everything done secretly will be made known to everyone.

3. There is nothing you can whisper in the dark or say secretly that won't be known as if shouted from the roof tops. You can't hide from God what you're doing.

4. I'm talking to you as my friends. Don't be fearful about what will happen to you as long as you're honest and do everything in the open. If you're arrested and they kill you, they've only killed your body and that's all they can do to you.

5. If there's something to be fearful about, it's losing your love and respect for your heavenly Father. He has power over your body and your soul and in the end

can destroy both.

6. But don't think of your heavenly Father that way. Instead, take a look at how He takes care of the sparrows. You can buy five of them for just pennies, and yet, your heavenly Father doesn't overlook one of them.

7. In fact, God knows the number of hairs you have on your head. So don't be afraid. You are worth more than thousands of sparrows?

8. I want to assure you that whoever is not ashamed to publicly acknowledge me as his Lord, I will publicly acknowledge him before the whole universe.

9. But if someone knows me and then publicly denies me, I have no choice but to publicly deny him.

10. However, if anyone says anything against me and is then sorry, he'll be forgiven. But if he continues to fight the convictions of the Holy Spirit, there is no other means whereby he can be forgiven.

11. Now when the time comes that they arrest you and bring you to trial whether before the rulers of the local synagogue, before a judge, or before anyone else in authority, don't worry about what you're going to say or how you can possibly answer all their questions.

12. The Holy Spirit will help you know what to say."

13. Then someone in the crowd interrupted and said, "Master, please talk to my brother and tell him to divide equally the inheritance our parents left us."

14. Jesus answered and said, "I have no legal right to function as judge and arbitrate an inheritance settlement between you and your brother."

15. And He went on to say to everyone present, be careful so you don't focus too much on money and in the process become covetous, because life is more than money or owning property."

16. Then He told them a parable and said, "A certain rich man owned much land, and year after year his farms kept producing large crops.

17. Soon the man didn't know where to store them all. So, as he thought about it, he said to himself, 'What am I going to do with all these crops? Where am I going to

store them all?’

18. Then he paused and said, ‘I know what I’ll do! I’ll tear down the old barns and build bigger ones and then I’ll have plenty of room for my crops.

19. After that I’ll retire and take life easy and have all I want to eat and drink.’

20. But that night after the man had made his plans for his retirement, he died. And God said, ‘I’m sorry you were so foolish to do what you did, because now who’s going to enjoy the things you worked so hard to get?’

21. That’s how life is for those who work hard to get everything they want and hardly ever think about God.”

22. Then Jesus turned to His disciples and said, “Don’t worry so much about this life--about what to eat or about how you look and what to wear.

23. Life is more than just eating, looking good, and wearing certain clothes.

24. Look at the birds; they can’t think ahead from one day to the next. They make no plans when to sow, when to reap, or worry about what barn to use for storing what they have. Yet God, in arranging nature, provided for them. Now if He did that for them, can you imagine how much more He will watch over you?

25. There’s not one of you who by concentration can add even a few inches to his height or a few extra years to his life.

26. If you can’t add to your own height or life, then why worry about what’s beyond your control.

27. Look at the flowers and notice how beautiful they are. They can’t spin nor weave, nor can they choose their own shades of color, and yet not even Solomon was dressed as colorfully as they are.

28. If God loves to make the flowers so colorful, when they exist only until someone mows the field and throws the cuttings in the fire, won’t He much more care about making you into a beautiful person? Why then do you have such little faith?

29. So stop worrying so much about the future whether or not you’ll have enough to eat and drink.

30. That’s what you would expect unbelievers to do, and that’s all that some of them think about. But you have a Fa-

ther who knows what you need.

31. Just put the values of His kingdom on the top of your list and leave the future with Him.

32. Don’t be afraid even though you’re comparatively few in number, because some day it will be your Father’s pleasure to give you the kingdom.

33. Sell what you don’t need and use the money to help others. Buy yourselves clothes that will last so that you don’t have to keep buying things and wasting money. Then deposit what you’ve saved in the bank of heaven, where there’s no bankruptcy, where no one breaks in and steals, and where your coins don’t rust and your paper money is not eaten by moths.

34. You see, where you put your money, there your heart will be.

35. Always be ready for service, to go wherever God calls you. And be sure to keep the lamps of your hearts trimmed and burning.

36. Be like servants who are eagerly waiting for their young master to return from picking up his bride and bringing her to his father’s house. And when he comes and knocks at the door, they’ll be ready to greet him.

37. How happy they’ll be when their young master comes and finds them waiting. He’ll make them sit down at His banquet table and personally serve them.

38. And whenever He decides to pick up His bride, whether it is in the evening or late at night, He’ll be delighted to find His servants waiting for Him and they’ll be glad they did.

39. To watch means to be as alert as a homeowner watching for a suspected thief. He needs to stay awake to protect his house, because he doesn’t know just when the thief will come.

40. So you, too, must watch and be ready, because the heavenly Bridegroom will soon leave and will come back when His servants least expect Him to.”

41. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Is this parable just for us or for everyone?”

42. Jesus answered and said, “Which foreman is considered dependable? Isn’t it the one who helps his fellow workers be successful? Isn’t he the one whom the

owner gladly puts in charge of things?

43. This type of foreman will be delighted to have the owner come, no matter what time of day it is, to see what he's doing.

44. And when the owner sees what his foreman has done and notices how glad he is to see him, he will put him in charge of everything he owns because he knows he can trust him.

45. Now, on the other hand, if a foreman says to himself, 'Who knows when the owner will come back,' and then starts to use his fellow workers for his own advancement, drinks on the job, even abuses those under him, and lives as he pleases,

46. the owner will come back when the foreman least expects him and at a time when he's acting irresponsibly. Then the owner will have no choice but to fire him and put his name on the list of those who are untrustworthy.

47. You can be sure that the foreman, who knew what the owner wanted, but still didn't do what he was expected to, will be held responsible more than someone who didn't know.

48. Now if someone doesn't know everything and because of his ignorance doesn't do what he should, the owner will not hold him responsible for what he doesn't know. He did the best he could with what he knew. More is expected from those who know than from those who don't.

49. I have come to start a spiritual fire in this world, and it's already lit.

50. But the price for this is my baptism of suffering, and I will feel under pressure until it's over.

51. Did you think I have come to usher in an era of peace? Well, you're mistaken. My coming brings inward peace but it often brings outward discord.

52. You can see it for example, in a household of five-three will be for me and two against me, or two for me and three against me.

53. You'll find fathers opposing their sons over me, and sons opposing their fathers. Also you'll find mothers opposing their daughters and daughters their

mothers. Mothers-in-law will turn against their daughters-in-law and daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law."

54. Then Jesus turned to the people and said, "When you see some dark-looking clouds coming out of the west, you say, 'Were going to have rain,' and it rains.

55. And when you notice that the wind is coming out of the south from the desert, you say, 'It's going to get hot,' and it does.

56. How can you be so sure about yourselves when you read the weather and be so uncertain about yourselves when it comes to making a decision about me?

57. Why don't you make up your mind about me and not let others keep influencing you?

58. It's like when someone takes you to court. You need to make up your mind in a hurry before you get there, because if you can settle things out of court, it'll be so much easier. Otherwise you'll have to face the judge, and if he finds you guilty, he has no choice but to have you locked up.

59. When that happens, you'll not be let out of jail until you've done your time or paid your debts."

CHAPTER 13

1. It was at about this time that some people told Jesus about the Galilean pilgrims who went down to Jerusalem to the Temple to offer sacrifices, and while they were there, a riot broke out and the governor sent his troops in to stop it. The soldiers came and slaughtered everyone in sight, even those helpless pilgrims.

2. Jesus responded to the incident and said to the people, "If you're telling me this because you think they were punished for their sins, you're wrong. Just because these pilgrims were caught up in a riot and were killed does not mean they were wicked people.

3. But there's one thing that's sure. If you don't make a change in your own lives and stop labeling other people by the things that happen to them, then your prospect of eternal life is as slim as was their prospect of escaping the sword.

4. What happened in the Temple is no different from what happened to those eighteen people who were killed when the

tower they were building near the pool of Siloam collapsed and fell on them. Do you think that they were more wicked than anyone else in Jerusalem at that time?

5. Absolutely not. So unless you repent and turn your own life around, your salvation is about as uncertain as was their escape when they ran from the falling tower."

6. Then Jesus told them this parable: "A certain landowner had a special fig tree planted in his orchard. After it took root and grew, he expected it to produce some fruit. But when he went and looked, he didn't find any.

7. After three years of waiting for the tree to produce some fruit, the owner said to his gardener, 'We've waited long enough. You had better cut it down because it's only taking up space and wasting good soil.'

8. Then the gardener said to the owner, 'Master, let's give it one more chance. Let me dig up the soil a little bit, fertilize it, and then let's see what happens.

9. If it still doesn't bear fruit, then let's cut it down.'"

10. One Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the local synagogues.

11. A woman there was so bent over with a curvature of the spine that she couldn't even straighten up anymore. She had been this way for the last eighteen years, and in addition, she was possessed by a demon.

12. When Jesus saw her, He called to her to come over, and when she came, He said to her, "Woman, you are now free from the demon and from your handicap. Come, stand up straight."

13. Then He put His hands under her bent-over shoulders and immediately she straightened up and started praising God.

14. When the local elder in charge of the synagogue saw this, he spoke out angrily against it because Jesus had healed someone chronically ill, which according to Jewish tradition, was forbidden on the Sabbath. He said, "There are six days in the week during which people can practice medicine on the incurable, but they may not do so on the Sabbath."

15. Then Jesus spoke up and said, "That

is hypocritical. There's not a person here who will hesitate to water his donkey or his ox on the Sabbath. How is this any different?

16. Shouldn't this woman, who is a daughter of Abraham and whom Satan has controlled for the past eighteen years, be set free from her imprisonment on the Sabbath?"

17. By the time He finished speaking, even those who hated Him were ashamed of their attitude, and soon the whole congregation was praising God for what Jesus had done.

18. Then He continued teaching them and said, "What is the kingdom of God all about and what can we compare it to?

19. It's like a tiny seed as insignificant as the mustard seed. But when a man takes this seed and plants it in his garden, it springs up and becomes a big mustard plant, and the birds happily build their nests on it.

20. What else can we compare the kingdom of God to?

21. Well, it's like yeast which women use when they bake bread. They mix it in with the dough and the whole batch quietly rises and is soon ready for baking."

22. **Soon** after this, Jesus made His way toward Jerusalem, stopping here and there at villages along the way, teaching the people as He went.

23. In one of the villages someone asked Him, "Lord, how many people will get to heaven, a lot or just a few? Isn't heaven only for those who are righteous?"

24. Jesus said, "How many will be saved or who will qualify for heaven shouldn't be your concern. You need to focus on your own life. Make every effort you can to get to heaven because many are hoping to get in without effort but they never will.

25. You see, once the Master of the house gets up and shuts the door, some will find themselves outside, and they'll knock and call out saying, 'Lord, please open the door.' And the Master will answer them and say, 'I can't open the door because I don't know who you are.'

26. Then they'll say, 'We ate and drank together while you were here on earth, and you taught in our villages. Surely you

know us!’

27. But He’ll answer and say unto them, ‘I’m telling you the truth. I don’t know you because you don’t know me. Please leave my presence. Your attitude is bad and your self-righteousness is beyond description.’

28. Then the reality of it all will hit them and they will grind their teeth in anguish and pain. It will be especially painful to them when they see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets inside, and find themselves on the outside.

29. Also, people will come from the East and the West, the North, and the South, and sit down with Abraham and the prophets at the feast in the kingdom of God.

30. And some who heard the gospel last, and some who were the least thought of, will be inside. And some of these who were the first to hear the gospel, and who were thought to be the most religious, will not be let in.”

31. Later that day, certain Pharisees came to Jesus and said, “You had better leave this area quickly because Herod wants to kill you.”

32. Jesus looked at them and said, “Go back and tell that fox that no matter what he does, he’ll not be able to kill me. I will continue to heal and teach the people even if it means staying an extra day or two. I’ll finish my work, and then I’ll leave.

33. I must keep on healing the sick and casting out devils for the next three days, then I’ll move out of Galilee and go on down to Jerusalem. For reasons Herod won’t understand, I will have to be killed in Jerusalem as the other prophets were, and not here in Galilee.

34. Jerusalem has killed many good prophets and stoned them to death when they were bringing the people a message from God. And that’s how it still is. I would love to gather all Israelites together and protect them as a mother hen gathers her little chicks and puts her wings over them to protect them from what is coming. But many of them won’t listen.

35. So now your Temple is left empty of God’s glory and without protection. In the near future it will be destroyed. I want to tell you that you’ll not appreciate the

salvation I’ve offered you until you see me coming in the clouds of heaven. But then it will be too late for you to say, ‘Blessings on Him who is coming in the name of the Lord.’”

CHAPTER 14

1. Now it so happened that Jesus was invited to Sabbath dinner by one of the leading Pharisees, and He accepted the invitation. But while He was there, some among the guests were asked to watch Him carefully to see if He would do or say anything for which they could have Him arrested.

2. And there was a man among the guests who was suffering from enlarged arms and legs caused by excessive body fluid. He made his way over to where Jesus was and asked Him to heal him.

3. Jesus turned to the lawyers and Pharisees sitting there and said, “Is it right to heal someone on the Sabbath?”

4. Nobody answered. So Jesus healed the man.

5. Then He turned to them and, noticing their distress, said, “Which one of you would hesitate to rescue your ox or donkey and leave it in a ditch on the Sabbath? Not one of you. You’d pull it out without a minute’s hesitation.”

6. Still they didn’t say a thing or answer His question.

7. Then He decided to tell them a parable because He had noticed how some of the guests were quick to pick the best seats. He didn’t want to embarrass anyone, so He said to them,

8. “When you go to a wedding, don’t sit up front where the relatives sit, or at the reception, don’t sit near the table of honor, because someone more important than you might come along and find you sitting where he’s supposed to sit.

9. Then the person who invited you will have the embarrassing task of walking to the front and saying to you, ‘Would you kindly move and give this man his place?’ Then you’ll have to get up and move to another seat, or at the wedding reception, move to another table near the back of the room.

10. So when you’re invited to any kind

of social function or to someone's house, choose to sit near the back of the room. If there is a vacancy near the front, the host will quietly walk up to you and say, 'Friend, why don't you come and sit up here? There's an extra chair just for you.' If that happens, the other guests will look admiringly at you, wishing they had been asked, especially those sitting at the same table with you.

11. So everyone who continues to make himself great will one day be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will one day be made great."

12. Then Jesus turned to the host and said, "When you plan a Friday evening supper or a Sabbath dinner, don't always invite just your friends, your fellow synagogue members, your relatives, or your well-to-do neighbors because you know they'll turn around and invite you over to their house.

13. You need to invite some poor people over to your house also, like the handicapped or those who are blind.

14. Then you'll feel good about yourself because they can't invite you back. Also, you'll have a standing invitation to come to the Great Marriage Supper of the King together with all the resurrected ones at the end of time."

15. When one of the guests who sat near Jesus heard what He had said, he responded by saying, "Happy is the man who has this invitation, but happier is the man who has qualified himself to be there!"

16. Then Jesus decided to correct him and said, "One day a certain rich man made a great feast to which he planned to invite his neighbors and friends.

17. When things were ready, he sent his servants out to ask those whom he had sent invitations to, to plan to come, because everything was ready for the upcoming celebration.

18. And all those invited had excuses. One of them said, 'I just bought a piece of property and I need to go and take another look at it. Please excuse me.'

19. Another one said, 'I just bought five teams of oxen and I need to hitch them up and try them out. Please excuse me.'

20. And still another said, 'I just got

married. I can't come today. I'm sure you understand. Please excuse me.'

21. So the servants came back and told their master what his neighbors and friends said. The rich man was terribly disappointed. Then he turned to his servants and said, 'Quickly, go out into the streets and alleys of the city and invite anyone you see, the poor, the handicapped, the ones who can't walk, and those who can't see.'

22. Soon the servants came back and said, 'Master, we did what you said and there's still room.'

23. Then their master said, 'This time go outside the city into the country lanes and outlying communities and press people to come so that my house can be full of guests.

24. I don't want any of my neighbors and friends to think they can ignore my invitation and then come at their convenience and find their places waiting for them.'"

25. **Then** Jesus left the Pharisee's house and a huge crowd followed Him. He stopped and turned to them and said,

26. "If any of you want to follow me, but you care more about what your father and mother, your wife and children, or your brothers and sisters think about me, you can't possibly be my disciple.

27. And if you're not willing to carry that kind of a cross for me, you're not really a disciple, no matter what you say.

28. You see, it's like this. When you plan to build a house, don't you first sit down and figure out what it will cost to see if you have enough money to finish it?

29. Because, if you don't, you may find that you only have enough money to build the lower half of the house, and you'll be the talk of the neighborhood.

30. People will say, 'Look at that! He started to build a house and didn't even figure out how much it would cost to finish it!'

31. Or, do you think a king would go to war without first consulting his generals to see if, with a force of ten thousand men, he could defeat his enemy who is coming against him with a force of twenty thousand men?

32. He does this when the other king is still a long way off. And if he thinks he can't defeat him, he'll send messengers to him and ask for terms of peace.

33. In the same way, not one of you can be my disciple unless you first think it through and then be willing to give up everything you have to follow me.

34. You see, salt is good for seasoning if it retains its zesty taste, but if it loses its flavor, what is it good for?

35. Its use for making food tasty is gone. It's not even good for the soil or suitable to mix with manure; it can only be used to harden things. That's why people throw it on the roadway. It's neither salt nor non-salt. So open your ears to what I'm telling you and think it through carefully before you decide to be my disciple."

CHAPTER 15

1. It seemed that only those who were socially unacceptable or those who were living sinful lives were the ones following Jesus and interested in what He had to say.

2. And, as so often happened when there was a crowd around Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees were there grumbling about what He had to say. On one occasion they spoke up and said, "This Man associates with prostitutes and even eats with them. How can He be a prophet?"

3. Jesus responded to their criticism by telling them the following parable. He said,

4. "If you owned a hundred sheep, wouldn't you be concerned if even one of them was missing? Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine who are peacefully grazing for someone else to care for and go out looking for that one foolish sheep until you found it?

5. And when you found it, what would you do? You would lay it across your shoulders and come back home singing.

6. Then you would go to tell your friends and neighbors that you found the sheep that was lost, and they would celebrate with you.

7. That's the way things are in heaven. When one sinner sees that he's doing wrong, confesses his sins, and changes his

life, the celebration in heaven over this one person is something you can't imagine. The joy is over the one who was found and repented, not over the ninety-nine who stayed home and don't need to repent.

8. What would a woman do if she had ten valuable coins and lost one of them? Wouldn't she sweep every part of the house and light a candle to look in every corner to find that coin?

9. And when she found it, what would she do? She would tell her friends and neighbors, 'Guess what! You know that valuable coin I told you I lost? Well, I just found it! I'm so happy! I couldn't help telling you.'

10. That's how it is in heaven. Everyone there is jubilant and celebrates over finding one person who was lost because of someone's carelessness and brought back to God."

11. **Then** He told them a parable about a family and said, "A certain well-to-do man had two sons.

12. The younger of the two was the restless type, wanting to leave home. One day He went to his father and said, 'Father, I would like to have my inheritance while I'm still young and can enjoy it.' The father hesitated, but his son insisted, so the father divided up the inheritance between his two boys and gave the younger his share of the money.

13. After a few days, the younger son got his things together and left. He wanted to get as far away from home as possible. He went to another country and there spent all his money in luxurious living, throwing big parties, and having a good time.

14. Now when all his money was gone, a famine hit that little country and he couldn't get a job anywhere.

15. He got so desperate, that he went out to the farms and offered his services free to anyone who would feed him. Finally, a man took him on to watch his pigs in exchange for feeding him. The young man accepted the offer and went and took care of the pigs.

16. But when he asked the farmer for more food because he wasn't getting enough to eat, the farmer told him to eat what the pigs ate. So he sat there and was

tempted to do just that.

17. But the thought of it was so revolting to him that he came to his senses and said to himself, 'What am I doing here? Just think how many people my father has working for him and all of them get well paid and are well fed. In fact, there's usually so much food left over that they have to throw some of it away! And here I sit with the pigs!

18. I'm going home! And I'm going to say to my father, 'Father, please forgive me for doing what I did. I have sinned against God and against you.

19. I'm not fit to be called your son, but please give me a job as one of your workers.'

20. With his mind made up and as weak as he was, he made his way home. And when he was still a great way off, his old father, who was sitting on the porch looking down the road, spotted him. His heart went out to his son with great compassion and love. He got up from his chair and down from the porch and started running toward his son. When he reached him, he threw his arms around him, hugged him, kissed him, and they both cried.

21. When the boy got his emotions under control, he said to his father, 'Father, please forgive me. I've sinned against God and against you. I'm not fit to be called your son....'

22. But before he could finish his little speech, the father turned to the servants who had come running to see what was going on and said to them, 'Run back to the house and bring my best robe for my son; bring my best ring for his finger, and my best sandals for his feet.

23. Then go out and find one of the best calves we have, slaughter it, and prepare a feast! We're going to celebrate!

24. This is my son who was lost! This is the son who I thought was dead! I thought he was gone for good, but he's home!' And the servants did what the father asked them to and everyone began to celebrate.

25. Now the older son had been working out in the field when all this happened. When he came home and neared the house, he heard music and saw people preparing

for a celebration.

26. So he called one of the servants and asked him what this was all about.

27. And the servant said, 'Your brother just came home! And your father asked us to slaughter one of the prize calves and prepare a feast and to celebrate his return home!'

28. Then the older son got angry and refused to join in the celebrations. So his father went looking for him. When he found him, he begged him to come to see his brother and to take part in the festivities.

29. But he said to his father, 'All these years while my brother was gone I've worked hard for you to build up the farm, and whatever you asked me to do, I did it. And yet you never even slaughtered a goat for me so my friends and I could celebrate together.

30. But as soon as this son of yours comes home from wasting the family fortune on prostitutes and luxurious living, you throw a party for him!'

31. Then the father said to him, 'Son, everything I have belongs to you, because your brother already has his inheritance. This whole farm is yours, but your brother has nothing. And besides, you and I have always had each other. But your brother, in spite of his money, had no one who really cared about him.

32. So it's the right thing to do to celebrate your brother's homecoming and to be glad he's back. You see, I really thought he was dead, but he isn't. Isn't that reason enough to celebrate?'"

CHAPTER 16

1. **Then** Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "I'm sure you've heard what happened recently to a certain wealthy man whose manager was accused of fraud and waste.

2. Well, the owner called the manager in and asked him, 'What's this I keep hearing about you? I can't believe it's true! But for your sake and mine, we better call in the auditors to check the accounts. And, if it's true that you've defrauded the company and wasted its funds, I'll have no other choice but to let you go.'

3. Then the manager said to himself, 'What am I going to do? When they look at the books and discover what I did, I'll be fired. Then where can I go to find another job? I'm too old to dig ditches, I won't qualify for unemployment, and it's just too embarrassing to go begging at the neighborhood soup kitchen.'

4. He thought a minute and then said, 'I know what I'll do! I'll quickly obligate people to me, so that when I'm dismissed, they'll gladly support me and even be my friends.'

5. So he called everyone who owed the company money and then said to the first one who came in, 'How much do you owe the company?'

6. He said, 'One hundred barrels of olive oil.' Then the manager said, 'Let me have your bill and I'll change it to read fifty.'

7. When the next person came in, the manager said to him, 'How much do you owe the company?' And he said, 'One thousand bushels of wheat.' Then the manager said, 'Here, let's see your bill. I'll change it to read eight hundred.'

8. Now, when the owner of the company heard about this, he called the manager in and congratulated him on his forethought and on his shrewdness in planning ahead and then fired him. It's amazing how careful secular people are about managing their earthly lives compared to the haphazard way God's people manage their spiritual lives."

9. Then Jesus turned to the Pharisees and said, "You should be just as careful to secure your spiritual future as this manager was to secure his earthly future. But don't secure it by seeing what others can do for you, rather secure it by helping others.

10. Your spiritual future revolves around the little things in life. The person who is dependable in doing little things will be dependable in doing big things, and a person who is dishonest handling secular things will also be dishonest handling spiritual things.

11. If you can't be trusted to handle money which has no value in itself unless it's used for something good, how can you

be trusted to handle spiritual riches which have eternal value?

12. And if you can't manage what belongs to someone else, as this manager did, how can you expect another owner to hire you as a manager?

13. You can't serve yourself and the company you're working for at the same time. You can't serve two masters because there will be situations in which you'll have to decide for one or the other. And when that happens, your primary interest will show itself to be with either one or the other."

14. Now this really bothered some of the Pharisees, especially those who loved being rich, and when Jesus finished talking to them, they belittled Him because He was poor.

15. "All you're doing by belittling me," Jesus said, "is trying to justify yourselves in front of these people. But God knows your hearts, and that which is so important to you means very little to Him."

16. Then Jesus continued and said, "The law of Moses and the writings of the prophets were the only guide people had until John the Baptist came, but since then the kingdom of God is being preached as good news and people everywhere are responding and pressing to enter.

17. And let me tell you that it is more possible for heaven and earth to pass away than it is for one iota to be erased from what the prophets and the law of Moses have to say.

18. The principles which the prophets laid down are still in force, and if you would listen carefully, you would hear them amplified in my teaching. One case in point is adultery. Any man who tells his wife to get out and issues her a personal letter of divorce, just so he can turn around and marry someone else, is plainly committing adultery; and the man who knows about this and encourages this sort of thing by marrying her is also committing adultery.

19. Now you keep telling people the story of a certain rich man who loved to dress in the best of clothes, to live luxuriously, and to eat lavishly.

20. And according to your story, there

was a certain beggar named Lazarus who had ulcers all over his body needing medical attention. And every day he sat outside the rich man's gate.

21. He was so hungry that he wished he could just have some scraps that the rich man fed to his dogs. In fact, these same dogs would come out of the house, go down to the gate, and lick this poor man's sores.

22. And as the story goes, the day came when the poor man died and was carried by the angels into glory to sit beside Abraham. Now soon afterward, the rich man also died and he too was buried.

23. Then he looked up out of hellfire where he was in awful pain and saw Lazarus in glory sitting next to Abraham.

24. So he cried out, 'Father Abraham! Have mercy on me! Please send Lazarus down here with just a little bit of water to cool my tongue, because the fires here are terrible!'

25. But Abraham said, 'Son, remember how you treated Lazarus when you were both still on earth? Remember how he needed medical help and how you ignored him? Remember what a luxurious life you lived and how he suffered and didn't have enough to eat, and you didn't even share the scraps from off your table with him? And now things are reversed. He is in glory sitting next to me and you are the one who is suffering.

26. Besides this, son, there is a great distance between heaven and hell so that no one from here can go down there, nor anyone from there come up here.'

27. Then, according to your story, the rich man said, 'I beg you, Father Abraham, if no one can come down here to help me, then please send Lazarus to my father's house,

28. because I have five brothers whom someone needs to talk to so that they won't do the same thing I did and end up suffering in this torturous place as I am.'

29. Then Abraham said, 'Moses and the prophets are very plain as to what your brothers should do.'

30. Then the rich man said, 'They don't listen to what is written. But if someone who died would go to them, I know they

would listen to him and repent and give to the poor.'

31. Then your story ends by Abraham saying, 'If your brothers are not willing to listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen to someone even though he rose from the dead.' So you see, you yourselves teach the people that they should listen to the Scriptures and what they do in this life will affect them in the next life."

CHAPTER 17

1. **Then** Jesus turned back to His disciples and said, "It's impossible to stop people from being tempted, but what a terrible thing it is for one person to lead others into sin, as the Pharisees are doing.

2. It would be better for everyone for that kind of person not to be around. He deserves to be treated for his crimes as anyone else who deliberately committed murder. They both deserve to have a large millstone tied to their necks and to be thrown into the sea.

3. So be careful what you do to people. If your brother sins against you, point it out to him, and if he says he's sorry, forgive him.

4. And if he does you wrong seven times in one day, and comes to you and says, 'I'm really sorry, please forgive me,' then forgive him."

5. Then one of the disciples said, "Lord, please help us to forgive seven times if that's what it takes."

6. Jesus said, "Forgiveness does not come in quantities; it's based on love and comes as a gift from God. First you have to learn how kind and forgiving God is before you can be that way yourself. And that depends on faith. You have to learn to trust God and believe that he can change you to be just like that. And learning to trust Him is like planting a tiny mustard seed and believing that God has given that seed enough power to do what He intended for it to do. You see, it's not beyond the power of God to do anything. If you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Pull yourself up by the roots and plant yourself in the sea,' and if God wanted it to happen that way, it would.

7. You also need to consider this. Suppose you had only one servant whom you hired to work your fields and to feed and care for your cattle. When he finishes his chores, do you then wait on him and serve him his dinner?

8. Of course not. Instead, you expect him to stop a bit early, to wash up, change his clothes, and go into the kitchen to prepare supper. After the family has eaten, then he eats.

9. And after your servant does this, do you thank him as if he's done something wonderful? Of course not. You expect him to do what he was hired to do and also to have sense enough to do what needs to be done without being told.

10. This is the same way it should be with you. After you have done what you're expected to do, you need to tell yourselves, 'We are unworthy but willing workers of a loving God and we have only done what was expected of us. We have no right to think we're so great or to look for some special reward.'

11. Now as Jesus made His way toward Jerusalem, He passed along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

12. As He approached a certain village, ten lepers came out to meet him and stopped some distance from him,

13. calling out to Him, "Master, have mercy on us!"

14. When Jesus got there, He looked at them, and said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." They did what He asked, and on the way they were healed.

15. Then one of them, who was a Samaritan, also went along to show himself to the priests. And when he saw that he was healed, he came running back to Jesus, praising God as loudly as he could.

16. When he found Jesus, he fell on his knees and bowed to the ground, thanking Him for what He had done for him. Though he was a Samaritan, he was not ashamed to publicly acknowledge that it was Jesus who had healed him.

17. Then Jesus said to him, "Weren't there ten of you? And weren't ten of you healed? Where are the other nine?"

18. They didn't come back with you to praise God for what He did for them?

You're a foreigner and a stranger in Israel, and you're the only one who came back to say thank you?"

19. Then Jesus added, "Stand up and be on your way; you put your confidence in an Israelite and went on your way to see the Jewish priest as I asked you to even though it didn't make sense, and this is what made it possible for you to be healed."

20. Now it was about this time that the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. He answered and said to them, "The kingdom of God will not come in the way you think.

21. It will not come so you can point to it and say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'Look, there it is!' because the kingdom of God starts inside of you."

22. Then Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "The time will soon come when you'll look back to these days you've spent with me and wish they would come back, but they'll be gone forever.

23. And people will say to you, 'We saw your Master. He's over here.' Or, 'We saw your Master over there,' but don't go running everywhere looking for me or following people who say they've seen me.

24. Because when I return, I'll light up the sky just like the lightning does when it lights up the sky from one end to the other.

25. But before that happens, the Son of Man will be arrested and rejected by His own people.

26. And when the end is near, just before the Son of Man comes back, it'll be like it was in the days of Noah.

27. Back then, people were engrossed in eating, drinking, falling in love, getting married, right up to the very day that Noah went into the ark and the rains came which produced the flood, and they all drowned.

28. It was the same way in the days of Lot. People were all caught up in eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, and building their homes.

29. All this was going on up to the very day that Lot was dragged out of Sodom by the angels when suddenly fire fell from heaven, destroying their city and everyone there.

30. That's how it will be when the Son of Man comes back.

31. Now, in the near future, you'll be forced to make some quick decisions just to save your lives. When the danger I'm speaking of comes and you're reclining on the flat roof of your house taking a nap, don't think of your belongings and try to come down to pack, or if you're out on the farm, don't try to come back home to save some things from the house.

32. Remember what happened to Lot's wife, who was so caught up with her belongings that when she left the city, she had to look back and lost her life.

33. That's how it will be in the near future when armies surround Jerusalem. Anyone trying to save what he has will lose his life, but anyone willing to lose everything he has will save it.

34. In the last days there will be a lot of surprises. Two men with their families might be living side by side in the same. One will be ready to meet the Son of Man and the other will not.

35. Two women might be working side by side at the mill. One will be ready for my coming and the other will not.

36. Or, two farmers might be working near each other out in the field. One will be ready for the end and the other will not."

37. Then the disciples asked Him, "When will all this happen, and where will those who are not ready go?" Jesus answered, "When people see in the distance a flock of vultures sitting in the trees, they know that down below a life has ended. And when God's people see all the things I mentioned happening around them, they will know that the end is near."

CHAPTER 18

1. Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to encourage them to stay close to God and to always pray so as never to become disheartened.

2. He said, "In a certain town there was a judge who had no respect for God and didn't care very much about people.

3. In that same town there was a widow who repeatedly went to see the judge and pleaded with him, saying, 'Please settle my case and don't let my enemies take what rightfully belongs to

me.'

4. For a long time the judge refused to hear the case, but after a while he said to himself, 'Even though I have no fear of God and don't care that much about other people's problems,

5. in order to get this woman to stop bothering me, next time she comes, I'll see that justice is done before she wears me out with her continuous pleading.'"

6. Then Jesus said, "What do you think this impious judge did? You know what he did.

7. Now let me ask you, do you think that God is like this wicked judge? Do you think He won't do anything for His people who cry to Him day and night for help until they plead with Him so much that He has to do something just to stop them from bothering Him?

8. I want to tell you that even though God sometimes waits before He answers, He will answer as quickly as possible. So He will restore what rightfully belongs to His people. But the real question is this: When God comes to set up His earthly kingdom, how many people will He find who really trust Him?"

9. Then Jesus told His disciples another parable aimed at those religious leaders who prided themselves in doing everything just right and despised others who didn't.

10. Jesus said, "Two men went to the synagogue to pray. One was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector.

11. The Pharisee stood up near the front and quietly prayed to himself, 'Dear God, I want to thank you that I'm not like some of our other leaders are: greedy, dishonest, committing adultery, or even like this tax collector in back of the synagogue who has sold out to the Romans.

12. I fast twice each week and pay an honest tithe on all my income.'

13. Now the tax collector stood in the back of the synagogue and didn't even feel worthy to come up front or to look up to God. But he stood back there, clutched his chest, and quietly said, 'Oh, God, forgive me. I'm just a sinner who desperately needs help.'"

14. Then Jesus added, "I want to tell

you that the tax collector went home forgiven, not the Pharisee. The reason is simple. Those who think they're great and are filled with pride don't feel their need of help, but those who feel their need of help are humble and can be trusted to be made great without becoming proud."

15. Just as Jesus finished talking, some mothers pushed through the crowd to have Him bless their infants. But when the disciples saw what was happening, and the many children accompanying their mothers, they stopped the women and told them not to bother Jesus.

16. When Jesus saw this, He said to His disciples, "Don't stop them. Let them bring their little ones because that's what the kingdom of God is all about, helping people, especially those who are innocent.

17. To tell you the truth, people need to become as innocent as infants or they'll never be allowed to enter God's kingdom."

18. It was about this time that a rather rich young man came to Jesus and asked Him, saying, "Good and holy Master, what should I do to be saved?"

19. Jesus answered and said, "Why did you call me good and holy? No one is good and holy, except God. Do you call me good and holy because you think I'm the Son of God?"

20. Now to answer your question about being saved, all you need to do is love God and keep His commandments. You know what they say: Don't commit adultery. Don't kill. Don't steal. Don't lie. And respect and care for your father and mother."

21. The young man said, "I've kept these commandments ever since I can remember."

22. Then Jesus said to him, "That's good, but you still need to do one more thing. Go and sell everything you have, distribute your money among the poor, and then come and follow me and help me proclaim the good news of the kingdom."

23. The young man couldn't believe what he had heard. He became very sad and walked away, because he was very rich.

24. When Jesus noticed how sad he looked as he walked away, He turned to

His disciples and said, "It's not easy for people who are rich and have all the conveniences of life to give up their comforts and with heart and soul take part in proclaiming the kingdom of God.

25. It's almost as impossible to help rich people change their values, to give themselves fully to the kingdom of God, as it is to lead a fully loaded camel through the tiny gate in the city wall."

26. When the people standing near Jesus heard this, they burst out in surprise and said, "If that's true, then who can make it to heaven if the people whom God has blest can't make it?"

27. Jesus turned to them and said, "What seems impossible to men is quite possible for God, if they will let Him help them."

28. Then Peter spoke up and said, "Lord, we did what you asked that young man to do. We've left everything and followed you all over Palestine. Now what will this do for us?"

29. Jesus spoke up so others nearby could hear Him and answered Peter and said, "Not one of you who has had to leave his home, his parents, his brothers and sisters, or his wife and children, to follow me, will miss his reward.

30. In this life, you'll experience a joy and satisfaction that no amount of money can buy, and in addition to this, you'll receive eternal life in the age to come."

31. **When** Jesus was once more alone with the twelve, He said to them, "Listen, we're now going to Jerusalem and everything that was written by the prophets about the Son of Man will happen.

32. He'll be arrested by His own people and turned over to the Romans for execution. The Romans will mock Him, insult Him, and spit in His face.

33. Then they'll whip Him and sentence Him to death by crucifixion, but three days later, He will rise from the grave."

34. But the disciples didn't understand what He was talking about. To them it seemed as if He was talking about someone else. So they didn't bother to ask Him any questions.

35. Now on their way to Jerusalem, as they were nearing Jericho, there was a blind

man sitting by the roadside begging.

36. And hearing crowds of people passing by, he asked what this was all about.

37. People told him that Jesus from Nazareth was coming this way and that He was surrounded by crowds of people.

38. Then the blind man cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, please have mercy on me!"

39. The people in front of Jesus scolded him and told him to stop his shouting and to be quiet. But he shouted all the louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

40. When Jesus reached the spot where the blind man sat, He stopped and asked the crowd to make room for Him. Then He turned to someone nearby and asked him to go get the blind man. And when he came, Jesus asked him,

41. "What is it that you want me to do for you?" The blind man said, "Lord, I want to be able to see again."

42. Jesus answered and said, "Well, then look up at me and you'll be able to see. Your faith in me has brought you forgiveness and given you your sight."

43. Instantly, the man could see and, as the crowd moved on, he walked beside Jesus, thanking and praising Him for what He had done. And when the people saw this, they all praised God.

CHAPTER 19

1. Soon Jesus reached Jericho. As He was passing through the town,

2. a man named Zacchaeus, who was the chief tax collector in the area and quite rich,

3. wanted to meet Jesus or at least to see what He looked like. But because he was so small and crowds of people surrounded Jesus, he couldn't see a thing.

4. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree, hoping he could get a good look at Jesus, who was heading in that direction.

5. And when Jesus came to the place where Zacchaeus was, He stopped, looked up, and said, "Zacchaeus, come down, because I would like to go to your house to visit with you."

6. Zacchaeus scrambled down as fast as he could and happily guided Jesus to

his house.

7. When the people saw the two of them walking together and Jesus actually going into the tax collector's house, they were terribly upset with Jesus for associating with a man who made a living collecting taxes from his own people to support the Romans.

8. Once inside, Jesus talked with Zacchaeus about the kingdom of God. After listening for awhile, Zacchaeus suddenly stood up and said, "Lord, I promise to give half of everything I own to the poor. And, if I've cheated anyone, I'll pay him back four times as much."

9. Then Jesus said to him, "With that response to what I've said, I know that you have tasted the first fruits of salvation and that in your heart you are a true son of Abraham."

10. The Son of Man is looking for people just like you to make up His kingdom. He loves to seek and to save those who are lost."

11. Then for the sake of those who were watching and listening, Jesus told a parable. He knew that from what He had said, they would expect Him to usher in the kingdom of God as soon as He arrived in Jerusalem.

12. He said, "There was once a young man of royal birth who was asked to govern a certain part of the country. The time came when he had to go back home to be crowned king.

13. So, before leaving, he called his district managers together and gave each of them a certain sum of money to invest to make that area of the country more productive.

14. But the people in that area hated him and sent a message to the palace which said, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'

15. But the ceremonies went ahead as planned, and he was crowned the country's new king. Sometime after the coronation and the celebrations, he came back and called together the district managers, each of whom he had given a certain amount of money to invest. He wanted to know what they did and how each man's enterprise was coming along.

16. The first manager gave his report and said, 'Lord, while you've been gone, I've been able to manage your money so that we have made a thousand percent profit, which is ten times more than you gave me.'

17. The new king said to him, 'Well done. You've been a good manager. And because you've been so faithful in advancing my interests, I'm going to put you in charge of ten cities.'

18. Then the second manager gave his report and said, 'Lord, I've been able to invest the funds you've entrusted me with and we were able to make a five hundred percent profit, five times more than you gave me.'

19. The new king responded to this manager the same way he had to the first one and said, 'Because you've used your managerial skills well, I'm going to put you in charge of five cities.'

20. The next manager said, 'Lord, I'm returning to you all the money you gave me. All the while you were gone, I kept the money in a safe place to make sure none of it would be lost.'

21. The reason I did this is that I know you expect a return from all your managers. I was afraid to invest it and thought, what if I lose it? Then what? So I decided not to invest it at all, but to keep it safely at home so none of it would be lost. I know that your expectations for managers are quite high, and in my judgment, they're quite unreasonable. So I thought it would be better to be safe than sorry.'

22. The king responded and said, 'By your own admission, you've just disqualified yourself to continue as my manager. If you thought that my expectations of you were unreasonable and that I was too hard a person to work for,

23. then why didn't you give my money to someone else to invest so I could have had some kind of return when I came back? But now there's no increase at all from the money I gave you.'

24. Then the king turned to his servants standing nearby and said, 'Take back the funds I gave this manager and give them to the ones who know best how to invest them.'

25. The servants were surprised and said to the king, 'But, Lord, the first manager already has more than enough to invest and so does the second manager.'

26. The king answered and said, 'Let me tell you that it's my responsibility to see to it that I get the highest returns from my investments. So I have no choice but to take my funds away from managers who do nothing with them, and give them to those who have brought in returns.'

27. Now as for those who didn't want me to be their king, bring them in and let me give them their sentence. The law of the land is that they have to suffer the consequences of their rebellion and die in the sight of their king.'

28. **When** Jesus finished the parable, He left the area and, with His disciples, headed for Jerusalem.

29. When they came to the little towns of Bethphage and Bethany just outside of Jerusalem, Jesus stopped near the top of the hill called the Mount of Olives and said to two of His disciples,

30. "Go into the nearest village, and just as you get there, you'll find a young donkey that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here."

31. And if anyone stops you and asks, 'What are you doing? This isn't your donkey!' then quietly tell him, 'The Lord would like to borrow it for a little while. We promise we'll bring it back.'"

32. So the two disciples went into the nearest village and found a young donkey tied up just as Jesus had said.

33. As they were untying it, the owners came out of the house and said, "What are you doing?"

34. The disciples said, "The Lord would like to borrow it for a little while. We promise we'll bring it back." So the owner let them take the donkey.

35. When they brought the donkey to Jesus, they sensed that He might want to ride it into Jerusalem. So they took off their outer robes, spread them on the young animal, and helped Jesus get on.

36. Instantly the crowd was electrified. The reason for this was that historically each new king rode into Jerusalem on a donkey as a sign of his reign. So some of

the people ran ahead of Jesus and spread their robes on the ground for the donkey to walk on. Others started praising God as they made their way to the top of the hill.

37. When they reached the crest of the hill overlooking Jerusalem, the crowd, together with the disciples, let out a shout of joy and began praising God, thanking Him for all the miracles that Jesus had done.

38. They chanted as they went, saying, "Blessed be the King. He comes in the name of the Lord. Peace be in heaven and glory to God."

39. Some of the Pharisees in the crowd tried to stop them and shouted to Jesus, saying, "Master, stop them! Can't you hear what they're saying?"

40. Jesus replied, "If I stop them, God will make the stones to shout."

41. The procession came on down the hill. When it got closer to Jerusalem, Jesus stopped the chanting for a moment and sat there and wept.

42. Then He said, "Oh, Jerusalem, if you only knew what you needed to bring you peace and that this is your last chance, but you still seem to be so blind.

43. The time will soon come when your enemies will surround you, blockade you, and close in on you from all sides.

44. They won't give up until they conquer you and flatten the Holy Places so that not one stone will be left standing on another. They'll have no mercy on anyone, not even the children. And all of this will happen because you missed your chance to bring about peace."

45. Then He urged the donkey forward, and the procession moved on into the city with the people shouting and chanting as they went, until they reached the Temple. There Jesus stopped, got off the donkey, and went inside. When He got inside, He told those who bought and sold animals at huge profits to get out.

46. He told the merchants, "It is written in the Scriptures that God said, 'My house is a house for worship and prayer, but you have turned it into a place for thieves.'"

47. The next few days Jesus taught openly in the Temple, and the chief priests, the teachers, and the leaders of the people

were determined to have Him arrested and executed.

48. But because the people around Him were taking in every word He was saying, and because many of them were being healed, the leaders found it difficult to arrest Him.

CHAPTER 20

1. **One** day when Jesus was teaching in the Temple and sharing the good news of salvation with the people, the chief priests, the teachers, and the leaders came to talk to Him and said,

2. "Tell us by what authority are you doing the things you're doing? And who gave you this authority?"

3. Jesus answered and said, "Let me ask you a question first, then I'll answer yours.

4. Did heaven authorize John the Baptist to do what he did, or did he get his authority from elsewhere?"

5. They went into a huddle and talked among themselves to see what answer to give. Finally, they said to each other, "If we say that John the Baptist got his authority from heaven, He'll say, 'Then why didn't you believe what he preached?'"

6. And if we say that he got his authority from elsewhere, we'll be in trouble with the people because they definitely believe that John was a prophet."

7. So they went back to Jesus and said, "We can't answer your question because we don't know who authorized him to do what he did."

8. Then Jesus said, "If that's the case, then I don't need to answer your question and to tell you who authorized me to do what I'm doing."

9. He then turned to the people and told them a parable. "A man owned some large vineyards. He leased one of them to certain vineyard keepers for them to plant and care for. Then he left for a distant country on business and was gone for quite some time.

10. Now, at the end of the first season, he sent one of his accountants to collect the agreed leasing fee and a percentage of the profits from the harvest. But the vineyard keepers beat up the accountant and sent

him away empty-handed.

11. So the owner sent another accountant to see them and they beat him up, too, mistreated him, and sent him away empty-handed.

12. The owner sent a third accountant to see the tenants and they did the same thing to him and then threw him out on the street all battered and bruised.

13. Then the vineyard owner said to himself, I know what I'll do! I'll send my own son whom I love so very much, because when they meet him, they can't help but love and respect him.

14. But when the vineyard keepers saw the son coming, they quickly talked the situation over and said to each other, 'This is the heir to the old man's property. Let's kill him. Then the vineyard will be ours.'

15. So at first they welcomed him, but then they grabbed him, took him outside the gate, and killed him. Now what do you think the vineyard owner will do to those tenants?

16. I'll tell you what he'll do. He'll come and destroy the whole lot of them and find some new tenants whom he can trust." And when the chief priests, the teachers, and the leaders of the people heard this, they quickly caught the meaning of the parable and said, "But God would never do something like that to us."

17. Then Jesus looked at them and said, "Tell me, what do the Scriptures mean when they say, 'The stone that the builders first rejected as worthless eventually was recognized as the very one they needed to hold up the corner of the Temple?'

18. Now spiritually speaking, whoever sees the value of this Stone and admits that he needs it, will have his heart broken. But those who reject this Stone will someday see it coming toward them, and they will try to stop it, but it will fall on them and crush them."

19. The chief priests, the teachers, and the leaders of the people knew that Jesus was talking about them and wished they could get their hands on Him, but they hesitated to do it in front of the people.

20. So they watched every move Jesus made. They even hired some men to pretend they wanted to be His disciples to

ask Him questions so they could trap Him in His own words and then accuse Him of having said certain things against the government. This would give them the excuse they needed to have Him arrested and turn Him over to the Romans to be tried for treason.

21. So, when they thought the timing was just right, these hired men asked Him, "Master, we know that what you teach is right. And we know that you don't say things just to please someone, no matter who he is. You teach God's truth whatever the consequences.

22. Now tell us, is it right for us to pay taxes to the Romans or not?"

23. Jesus saw through their flattery and said, "Why do you ask me a controversial question like that in public? Are you trying to trap me by getting me to say something I shouldn't?

24. If you're carrying a Roman coin, let me see it." And when they gave Him a Roman coin, which, according to their tradition, they were not supposed to be using because it would admit allegiance to Caesar, Jesus looked at it and said, "Whose picture is on this?" They said, "Caesar's."

25. Then Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what is his, and give yourselves to God because you were made in His image."

26. So they couldn't use against Him what He said about taxes, nor could they argue with Him about it in front of all the people, because they supposedly wanted to be His disciples.

27. After this, the Sadducees decided to come to Jesus to ask Him about the resurrection of the dead, which they don't believe in.

28. They said, "Master, Moses wrote that if a man's married brother died and he left no children, then the unmarried brother should marry his dead brother's wife and have children by her to keep up the family name.

29. Now we know of a case involving seven brothers. The oldest one married but soon died without having left any children.

30. So the second brother followed the law and married his dead brother's wife, but suddenly he died before he could fa-

ther any children.

31. So the third brother married the young widow and so on until all seven brothers had married her without any of them having fathered any children.

32. Finally, the woman died, too.

33. Now to whom will she belong in the resurrection? Whose wife will she be since she was married to all seven of them?"

34. Jesus answered and said, "In this world people marry and are given in marriage, and you think that's how it'll be in the next world, but that's not necessarily so.

35. Those who are resurrected and live in the next world will neither marry nor be given in marriage.

36. People will not die there, so the comparisons you're making between life on earth and life in heaven are not true. There people will be immortal as are other celestial beings, and they'll be God's special children because they've been redeemed and raised from the dead.

37. You know that the dead are raised, for when Moses tells his experience with the burning bush, he refers to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

38. And from the experiences of these Patriarchs you can tell that they believed that God is not a God of death, but a God of life. In fact, He is the great Life-giver."

39. Then certain teachers who overheard the conversation said, "Master, you gave them the right answer."

40. After this, the Sadducees decided not to ask Jesus any more questions.

41. Then Jesus asked them a question and said, "Why do people believe that the Messiah will be a descendant of King David?

42. David himself said, 'The Lord Jehovah will say to my Lord and Master, Come and sit next to me in the place of honor.

43. Someday all your enemies will acknowledge who you are.'

44. Now, if David calls this person Lord and Master, how can He also be his descendant?" But no one could answer Him.

45. Then Jesus changed the subject and, in the hearing of all the people, said to His disciples,

46. "Be careful of teachers who like to

walk around in long robes and love to be treated with respect when they go to the market; who always expect to be given the choice seats in any meeting and want nothing but the best when they're invited out to eat.

47. These same teachers won't hesitate to take the last penny from a poor widow for their own religious projects and then turn around and make a show of their great commitment to the Lord and what they did for Israel. They offer long and beautiful prayers in the synagogue for all to hear, but they're under greater condemnation than the common folk because of what they claim to know."

CHAPTER 21

1. Just then Jesus turned around and noticed some rich men bringing their gifts to the offering box outside the Temple and putting their money in with a great show and flair.

2. He also noticed a poor widow who ashamedly and almost apologetically dropped two pennies into the offering box.

3. Jesus drew the disciples' attention to the whole scene and then said, "I want to tell you the truth of what you've just seen. This poor widow gave more than all these rich men put together.

4. The reason is simple. The rich men gave from their wealth, but she gave the last two pennies she had to live on."

5. Later, as they were leaving the Temple, some of His disciples pointed out to Him the ornate artwork and the rich decorations of the Temple and their enormous value.

6. But Jesus responded and said, "These things that you admire so much will soon be gone. In fact, the time is soon coming when not a single stone making up the walls of the Holy Place will be left in its place; every one of them will be thrown down."

7. The disciples were stunned when they heard this and said to Him, "Master, when will this happen? And what should we look for to know when this will take place?"

8. He said to them, "Just be alert so you're not deceived, because just about

then many false messiahs will come, making all sorts of claims. This is how you'll be able to tell that the time for the destruction of the Temple is near. And don't believe what the false messiahs will tell you, and don't go running after them.

9. When there is an increase in military buildup when you hear about skirmishes here and there, and when political upheaval shakes the empire, then you'll know that the time is near for the Temple to be destroyed. But don't be terrified and get discouraged, because these things have to happen before the kingdom of God is set up."

10. Then He added, "Now, before the end comes, nations everywhere will be fighting other nations, and countries will be making alliances to fight other countries; peace treaties will be made and peace treaties will be broken.

11. Nature itself will seem to be in revolt, because earthquakes will become more numerous and will happen in the most unexpected places. Famines will affect whole continents and diseases will spread around the world and impact people everywhere. Also there will be signs in the sky and terrifying things coming down from outer space, and fearful things will happen so rapidly that thinking men everywhere will be deeply concerned.

12. Now before the Temple is destroyed, the Jewish authorities will lay their hands on you, mistreat you, and turn you over to the synagogue officials for trial and imprisonment. Also, you'll be arrested and brought before the civil authorities for trial and execution, and all because of me.

13. Yet this will be used by God as a witness to the truth.

14. When that happens, don't worry about what you're going to say when they arrest you and about how you're going to answer all their questions.

15. I'll be there with you to put words in your mouth and to help you answer questions in such a way that the authorities will not be able to refute you.

16. You'll also need to know that your parents, your brothers and sisters, your relatives, and your friends will not hesi-

tate to turn against you and turn you over to the authorities, and will even testify against you to get you convicted and sentenced to death.

17. You'll be hated everywhere because of me, and these same things will happen to my followers all around the world just before the end comes.

18. But don't forget that not one hair on your head can be uprooted without your heavenly Father's consent.

19. It's by your faith in me that you'll be able to stand.

20. Now when you see Jerusalem surrounded by the Romans, then you'll know that the destruction of the Temple is only a matter of time.

21. And the time for you to flee to the mountains is when you see the Roman armies temporarily retreat. That's when those who are in the city should get out, and those who are outside should not come back in.

22. The Romans will return and avenge themselves on the Jewish nation for all the trouble they've caused them. All this is the fulfilment of prophecy.

23. The siege of the city will be especially hard on pregnant women and nursing mothers. The whole country will be in turmoil because God's protection will be withdrawn.

24. The war will be like a huge slaughter, and those who survive it will be taken as slaves to Rome and from there sold and scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Jerusalem itself will be destroyed and the marching feet of her enemies will walk on her ashes. But also the time is coming when their cities will be destroyed and God's faithful will walk on their ashes.

25. Now, before all this happens there will be strange things taking place. The sun will stop shining, the moon will turn as red as blood, and there will be showers of falling stars. The nations of earth will be in turmoil, and their leaders will be perplexed about knowing what to do. In fact, nature itself will seem to be turned out of its course with unexpected disasters on land and sea.

26. When thoughtful men try to look into the future, their hearts will sink for

what they'll see lying ahead for the human race. This will be the time when even the planets in outer space will be driven from their course.

27. When this happens, the Son of Man will return in all His power and glory.

28. Now, when those of you living near the end see these things happening, cheer up, hold your heads high, because He who redeemed you is about to come to save you."

29. Then He told them a parable and said, "Now take a look at the trees and especially the fig tree.

30. How can you tell from looking at them that it's springtime? When you see their leaves beginning to appear. That's how you know that spring is here.

31. That's the same way those living at the end will be able to tell when the kingdom of God is about to come, when they see all the things happening that I just told you about.

32. And some of these things will come on Jerusalem before all those now living there have died.

33. Heaven and earth will have to pass away to change what I just told you.

34. So be careful and don't let yourselves be caught up in constant feasting and drinking. Also don't let yourselves be caught up in the problems of life so that you don't think about anything else. If you do, the end will sneak up on you like a thief.

35. All over the world people will be caught by surprise.

36. So stay alert and have the same kind of dependent attitude on God when you go about your work as when you feel your need of Him in prayer. This will help you to escape the snares and mind-traps of the last days so you can be one of those who will be glad to see the Son of Man coming to take you home."

37. During the last few days of His life, Jesus taught in the Temple every day. At night He would go out to one of the hills overlooking Jerusalem, called the Mount of Olives, to pray.

38. And early every morning the people came back to the Temple to listen to what He had to say.

CHAPTER 22

1. **Now** as the religious holiday called the Passover drew near, when the Jews eat only unleavened bread,

2. the chief priests, the teachers, and the leaders of the people tried to figure out a way to arrest Jesus and have Him convicted and executed without stirring up the people.

3. That's when Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve disciples, suddenly seemed to be controlled by demons.

4. He went and talked with the chief priests and officers of the Temple guard, offering his services to have Jesus arrested.

5. They were thrilled with his suggestion and offered him thirty pieces of silver for his services.

6. Judas agreed, and promised to come up with a workable plan by which Jesus could be arrested without stirring up the people.

7. Now the Passover begins in the evening, and it is Jewish custom to kill a lamb and prepare the Passover meal with its unleavened bread during the day.

8. So Jesus said to Peter and John, "Go prepare the Passover meal for us so we can all eat it together."

9. And they said, "Where do you want us to have it? We're not from here, so we don't have any idea where to go to find a place large enough for all of us. Jerusalem is flooded with people and there's no room anywhere."

10. Jesus said to them, "Go into the city and, as soon as you get inside the gates, you'll see a man carrying a large container of water on his head, so you can't miss seeing him. Just follow him to where he's going.

11. Then knock on the door he enters and say to the owner of the house, 'Our Master sent us here and wants to know where the guestroom is where He and His disciples can eat the Passover meal together.'

12. He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Look it over and then make all the necessary preparations."

13. The disciples followed Jesus' instructions and went into the city. As soon as they passed through the city gate, they

spotted a man carrying a large container of water on his head. So they followed him, found the room, and prepared for the evening meal.

14. When the time came for the Passover meal to be eaten, Jesus and the other disciples arrived at the house, went upstairs to the room, and made themselves comfortable, all twelve of them being there.

15. Then Jesus said to them, "I've been looking forward to eating this Passover meal with you, not only because it's our custom, but also because I wanted to be alone with you before I die.

16. This is the last meal we'll have together with all of us present. I will not eat it again until its meaning is fulfilled by the coming kingdom of God."

17. Then He reached over and took the cup of fresh grape juice sitting in front of Him, said the blessing, turned to His disciples, and said, "Here, take my cup and pass it around because I want each of you to drink from it.

18. I want to tell you that I will not taste fresh grape juice again until the kingdom of God is set up."

19. Then He took one of the small loaves of bread in front of Him, said the blessing, broke the bread in half, and passed one half down each side of the table. Then He turned to His disciples and said, "This broken loaf of bread represents my own body which I will offer up for you. So, whenever you eat together like this, remember me."

20. He also took the cup after it had made the rounds and said, "This fresh grape juice represents the fulfilment of God's covenant of redemption through the shedding of my blood.

21. The time has now come for me to die. I've already been betrayed into the hands of those who seek my life by the man who is sitting at the same table with me.

22. The Son of Man will be obedient and do His Father's will, but I feel sorry for the man who betrayed me."

23. Then the disciples started asking each other which one of them it was who had done such a thing.

24. Only a short time ago, there had

been an argument among them about which one of them would be honored the most when Jesus set up His kingdom.

25. So now Jesus reminded them about the nature of His kingdom and said, "In the political world, kings and rulers who exercise authority over people call themselves the nation's benefactors.

26. But that's not the way it should be with you. If anyone wants to be the most honored in my kingdom, let him first be a willing servant. And if he wants to rule, let him first learn to be humble."

27. Then He said to them, "At a banquet, the one most honored sits down to be served. And that's how all of you have been acting ever since we came here this evening. But who served you? I did. I did it to show you that I'm here to serve.

28. Now I do appreciate the way you've stayed with me all these years throughout my ministry, facing all the problems you had to because of me.

29. So, I'm giving you the right to rule with me just as my Father has given me the right to rule with Him.

30. I assure you that we will eat together again in my kingdom, and that you will sit next to me and rule over the twelve tribes of spiritual Israel."

31. Then Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Simon, Simon, Satan is determined to test your loyalty to me, and if possible, separate you from me. He wants to shake you as a farmer shakes his wheat during the harvest to separate the kernels from the chaff.

32. But I'm praying for you that your trust in me will be steady and strong and that you'll continue to stay by me no matter what. And after you survive the test and turn back to me, then you'll be able to inspire your fellow believers to be loyal to me, which is what I want you to do."

33. Peter answered and said, "But I'm loyal to you now, and I'm ready to follow you to prison and even to death."

34. Then Jesus said, "I want to tell you something, Peter. You are just too overconfident. That's your big problem. And I want to tell you that before the cock crows in the morning, you will have taken an oath that you don't even know me."

35. Then He talked to the other disciples and said, "When I sent you out that time without money, without an extra robe, or even an extra pair of sandals, did you lack anything?" "Not a thing," they said.

36. "From now on," Jesus said, "things will have to be different. If you have some cash, you need to take it with you; if you have an extra pair of sandals, take them, too. And if you can find someone to sponsor you on your missionary journey, you need to do so. Also you need to be ready to exchange the comforts of your own homes for the rigors of travel and face death by the sword.

37. I'm telling you this because it's just like Isaiah said, 'The Messiah will be treated as a criminal.' And all these things that have been written about me are coming true."

38. Then the disciples said, "Lord, look, we have two swords among us already, and we're ready to do hand-to-hand combat for you!" Then Jesus said, "You still don't understand, do you? Well, I've said all I could for now because it's time to go."

39. Then Jesus got up, went downstairs, left the city, and made His way toward the Mount of Olives where He had often gone to pray. And His disciples followed Him.

40. When He arrived at the garden called Gethsemane, He said to the three disciples who went into the garden with Him, "You also need to pray so you won't be overcome by temptation."

41. Then He walked about a stone's throw beyond them and knelt down on the ground and prayed,

42. "Father, if you see fit and are willing to release me from this part of my mission, please do so. Don't let me go through this experience. Nevertheless, if that's what you want, your will for me be done."

43. When He finished praying, an angel came from heaven and strengthened His human frame so He could go on and taste the full force of separation from God that sinful men in the end must face.

44. Then the force of it hit Him. He swayed back and forth and again fell to His knees. This time He clutched the ground as He lay there in agony, and

prayed so earnestly that His perspiration was discolored by blood as it ran down His face and dripped to the ground.

45. Finally, He got up and walked back to His disciples. He hoped He would find them in prayer, but instead He found them sleeping, no doubt worn out with worrying about what was going to happen next.

46. He woke them up and said, "Why did you fall asleep just when I needed your prayers? You'd better get up and pray for yourselves so you won't fall prey to Satan."

47. But before He even finished talking, Judas, one of the twelve, appeared at the entrance to the garden, leading a mob straight to Jesus. When they got there, he walked up to Jesus and gave Him a brotherly hug and kiss.

48. Jesus looked at him and said, "Why did you decide to identify me by kissing me?"

49. By this time, the disciples pressed around Jesus and said, "Lord, do you want us to protect you and fight for you? We're ready. Just say the word."

50. In fact, Peter pulled out a short sword and swung it at the High Priest's servant who was standing nearby. Luckily, the man saw it coming and moved his head in time to save his neck, but the blade did catch his ear and sliced it off.

51. Jesus turned to Peter and told him to stop and to put his sword away. Then He told the mob to wait a moment, picked up the servant's ear, and put it back in place completely healed.

52. Next He turned to the chief priests, to the officers of the Temple guard, and to the elders who were there and said, "Why have you come out here in the middle of the night? Were you planning to catch a thief or a robber who was running away from the law?"

53. If I'm a thief or a robber, why didn't you arrest me when I was sitting in the Temple teaching the people? I've been there every day for the last few days. But I guess this is your way of doing it. The power of darkness will have its hour."

54. Then they led Him back into town to the palace of the retired High Priest first. Peter followed the mob, but at a safe

distance.

55. When they arrived at the High Priest's palace, they took Jesus inside. Those who were not allowed in decided to stay in the courtyard where they built a fire to keep warm. And Peter was one of them who sat down to keep warm.

56. As they sat there, one of the servant girls looked him carefully up and down and then spoke to the group and said, "This man is one of Jesus' disciples and was with Him in the garden."

57. Peter denied it and said, "Woman, I don't know the man you're talking about."

58. A little while later, another person recognized him and said, "You're one of Jesus' disciples, aren't you?" Peter answered and said, "Man, you don't know what you're talking about."

59. Then about an hour or so later, another person spoke up and with great certainty said to the group, "Now that I think about it, this man is one of the disciples of Jesus. It's true because he's a Galilean. Just listen to his clean talk."

60. Again Peter spoke up and said, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about." And he started swearing and cursing to prove that he wasn't a disciple. He had hardly finished, when somewhere nearby a cock crowed.

61. At that same moment Jesus was being led from the retired High Priest's palace to the assembly hall of the Jewish high court. He turned and looked down at Peter just as Peter looked up to see what the commotion was all about. And their eyes met. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had told him when they ate together the evening before: "Before the rooster crows in the morning, you will have denied knowing me three times."

62. Then Peter ran from the courtyard all the way back to the garden and there fell on his knees and wept bitterly in the same spot where Jesus had prayed.

63. Once inside the assembly hall, the guards holding Jesus started to make fun of Him by slapping Him in the face.

64. They blindfolded Him, slapped Him, and then said to Him, "You're supposed to be a prophet, aren't you? Well, then tell us who slapped you."

65. And there were many other cruel things they did to Him as they swore at Him and cursed Him out.

66. Now at the first glimpse of daylight, the leading elders of the synagogue, the chief priests, and the important teachers came together to try Jesus. Then they had the guard bring Him in so they could question Him.

67. They asked Him, "Are you really the Messiah? If so, tell us." Jesus answered and said, "If I tell you as plainly as I could, you still wouldn't believe me."

68. And even if I were willing to discuss it as a possibility, you wouldn't want to because you're not really interested in letting me go.

69. But let me say this. You will have an opportunity to know that I am the Messiah when you see me sitting on the right hand of God the Father entrusted with full power and authority."

70. Then, like an avalanche of voices, they asked Him all at once, "Are you saying that you are divine? That you are the actual Son of God?" And when finally all of them quieted down, Jesus said, "You have stated it correctly."

71. When they heard this, they all shouted and screamed, "That's it! We don't need any more witnesses! He's condemned Himself, and we've heard it with our own ears!"

CHAPTER 23

1. Then all the members of the court stood up, and the High Priest in office ordered Jesus to be taken to Pilate.

2. There they accused Him, saying to Pilate, "This fellow is going around the country stirring up trouble by telling people not to pay taxes to Caesar and also telling them that He's been chosen and anointed by God to be their new king."

3. Then Pilate, who was the Roman governor, turned to Jesus and said, "Are these charges true? Do you really think that you're the legitimate king of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "You've just said so."

4. After questioning Jesus further, Pilate announced to the people: "I don't find this man guilty of treason, nor do I find that He's a trouble-maker. And if He

thinks He's a king, let Him think so."

5. Then the crowd became angry and shouted threats at Pilate saying, "He is a trouble-maker, He's stirring up people from Galilee to Jerusalem!"

6. When Pilate heard the name Galilee, he asked someone if Jesus was a Galilean.

7. As soon as this was confirmed, he realized that he was trying someone illegally and that Jesus should be tried by King Herod. Knowing that Herod was vacationing in Jerusalem, he sent Jesus over to him to be tried.

8. When the priests, followed by the mob, arrived with Jesus at Herod's summer palace, Herod was glad they had come. He had always wanted to meet Jesus because of all the miracles he had heard that Jesus had done.

9. So he started asking Jesus a lot of questions, but Jesus remained silent and didn't answer.

10. The chief priests and the teachers became angry at His silence and accused Him of the same things they had accused Him of in front of Pilate.

11. Soon after the soldiers started mocking Jesus, Herod himself joined in, and they all danced around Jesus, shoving Him around the circle, making fun of Him. After they did this for some time, they got an old royal robe, put it over His shoulders, and sent Him back to Pilate.

12. Interestingly, that same day Pilate and Herod, who had always been bitter enemies, became the closest friends because they acknowledged each other's authority.

13. When the priests and the mob got back to Pilate's palace, Pilate cross-examined Jesus again. This time he did it privately. When he had finished, he came out to speak to the chief priests, to the leaders, and to the people assembled there and said,

14. "You brought this man to me as someone who stirs up the people and incites violence and rebellion. I've examined the prisoner again and still don't find Him guilty or even having the inclination to do the things you accuse Him of doing.

15. When I sent Him to Herod, he also

found Him innocent and sent Him back. There is nothing this man has done for which I should condemn Him to death.

16. I'll have Him flogged by my soldiers for what you say He did and hope that satisfies you. Then I'll release Him."

17. Now Pilate usually released one Jewish prisoner at the Passover festival as a goodwill gesture to the people. So after the flogging, he thought he would release Jesus.

18. Then the crowd roared at him and shouted, "Don't release Him! Release Barabbas!"

19. Now Barabbas had been arrested and convicted of treason and murder and also of starting riots against the Romans in Jerusalem where Pilate lived.

20. And that's one reason why Pilate wanted to release Jesus rather than Barabbas. So once more he spoke to the crowd, urging them to accept the release of Jesus.

21. But the crowd shouted louder than ever, "Don't release Him! Kill Him! Crucify Him!"

22. Then for the third time, Pilate addressed the crowd and said, "Why are you so eager to have this man killed? What great crime has He committed to deserve death? I find no reason to have Him crucified. I'll have Him flogged again just as severely as before. That should be enough to satisfy you. And then I'll let Him go."

23. Even after the second flogging, the mob broke out in a chant demanding Jesus' execution. And, under the prodding of the chief priests, their persistent chanting finally paid off.

24. So Pilate handed down the sentence that Jesus should be executed by crucifixion.

25. Then he released Barabbas, the man they wanted, the one who had been convicted of sedition and murder. So Jesus was turned over to the execution squad for crucifixion. And that, too, is what the people wanted.

26. Then they put on Jesus' shoulders the heavy crossbeams that were intended for Barabbas and led Him away. But because of the dual flogging, Jesus' torn muscle couldn't carry the cross. So the soldiers picked out a man from the crowd

called Simon, who was a Cyrenian visiting Jerusalem, to carry the cross for Him.

27. A huge crowd lined the streets as the procession made its way out of the city and up the hill to the place of execution. Many women whose children had been healed by Jesus were in the crowd, crying.

28. As Jesus swayed back and forth, walking behind the man carrying His cross, He stopped, turned to a group of women lining the procession route, and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't cry for me, but cry for your own children and your own people.

29. The time will soon come when women just like you will say, 'How lucky are those who have no children, those who aren't pregnant, and those who don't have to nurse little ones.'

30. And others will look up to the hills and mountains and say, 'We wish those hills and mountains would fall on us and bury us.'

31. You see, if the sins of the world can be placed on me, a green olive tree, I hate to think what will happen to unrepentant sinners who are like dead trees and will have to bear the consequences of their own sins."

32. Now there were two other men sentenced to death who had been Barab-bas' accomplices. They would have been crucified on either side of him, but now they were going to be crucified with Jesus.

33. When the procession reached the top of the hill outside of Jerusalem, called Calvary, they first tied Jesus to the cross and then nailed His hands and feet in place. And then they raised His cross, in the middle, with the traitors on either side.

34. Now while they were nailing Him to the wooden beams, He spoke and said, "Father, forgive these men; they're just carrying out orders. They don't really know what they're doing." Then when the soldiers finished their job and the crosses were in place, they took Jesus' seamless robe and gambled over it because of its value.

35. All the while, the crowd was standing nearby, watching and listening to everything that was going on. Then the chief priests and the leaders of the people

started making fun of Jesus, saying, "Just look at Him! He was always going around helping others, and now He can't even help Himself. If He's the Messiah, the One chosen to save us, let Him first save Himself."

36. Then the Roman soldiers also joined in the fun, teasing Him and offering Him a drink of cheap wine in a sponge attached to the end of a stick.

37. They shouted up at Him, saying, "If you're a king, where's your army? Aren't they going to come and rescue you?"

38. Now over Jesus' head, they had nailed a sign which read, "This is the King of the Jews!" written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew so that as many as possible could read it.

39. Then one of the traitors, hanging on one of the other crosses, started mocking Jesus and said, "If you're the Messiah as you say you are, why don't you save yourself and us!"

40. But the other traitor tried to silence the attack by saying, "Don't you have any fear of God in your soul? In a few hours, you and I will be dead.

41. And we're getting what we deserve, but this Man is being executed even though He's innocent! Didn't you hear what the soldiers said about the whole trial and how Pilate found no fault in Him?"

42. Then he turned to Jesus and said, "Lord, I believe in you! Please, don't forget me when you set up your kingdom."

43. Jesus turned His head toward him and said, "This is the day of our death, but I'm promising you that you will live again and be with me when I set up my kingdom."

44. By this time it was noon, and Jesus had been hanging on the cross for about three hours. Suddenly some dark clouds appeared on the horizon and soon Jerusalem and the surrounding area were covered with a dense, eerie darkness which lasted for the next three hours.

45. It was so dark that the sun itself seemed to be blotted out. About this time, the priests in the Temple were preparing for the evening sacrifice when suddenly the heavy drape covering the entrance to the Most Holy Place split in two, begin-

ning from the top all the way to the bottom.

46. The drape split in two at precisely the same moment that Jesus, with His last ounce of strength, cried out, "Father, I give my spirit into your hands!" And having said that, He died.

47. Now when the Roman captain in charge of the execution heard this last cry and thought of all the things that had happened that day, he said, "There is no doubt in my mind that this Man was the Son of God in human form."

48. And many of the people who came out to watch the crucifixion, after they witnessed all the things that had happened, beat their chests and groped their way back into the city.

49. Soon the only people who were left were those who were close to Jesus, such as the women who had followed Him all the way there from Galilee. They stood some distance from the cross and had seen all these things happen.

50. Now there was a man among the followers of Christ whose name was Joseph. He was a member of the Jewish court and was a good and honorable man.

51. He was one of those who had voted against putting Jesus to death. He lived in the nearby city of Arimathea and was one of those honorable Jews who were waiting for the kingdom of God to come.

52. This man went to see Pilate and begged him to let him have the body of Jesus so he could bury it and keep it from being mutilated or thrown to the dogs.

53. Pilate turned the body over to him and Joseph returned to the crucifixion site and, with the help of the disciple John, took Jesus' body down from the cross. Then they wrapped it in a linen burial sheet and laid it in a nearby tomb which had been newly carved out of the rock. It was to have been Joseph's own burial site.

54. That was Friday afternoon, the day the Jews call the Preparation Day. And the Sabbath would soon begin.

55. Now the women who were still there, the ones who had followed Jesus all the way down from Galilee, stayed by and saw how Jesus' body was laid out on the stone slab inside the tomb.

56. Then they all went home and prepared some burial spices and ointments to use on Jesus' body early Sunday morning. And they rested on the Sabbath and kept the Sabbath according to the commandment.

CHAPTER 24

1. **Now** after the Sabbath, before dawn on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women came back to the tomb carrying with them the burial spices and ointments which they had prepared Friday afternoon.

2. And when they got to the tomb, they found that the huge stone covering the entrance had been rolled back.

3. They cautiously went inside the tomb and found that the body of Jesus was gone.

4. As they stood there confused and stunned, suddenly two men in shining robes appeared, standing only a few feet away from them.

5. The women were afraid, fell to their knees, and bowed their heads to the ground, not knowing what this was all about. Then the men spoke up and said, "Why are you looking in a tomb for a Man who is alive?"

6. The Man you're looking for is no longer dead. Jesus is alive! He is risen! Don't you remember what He told you when you were with Him in Galilee?

7. He told you then, 'The Son of God will be arrested by angry and sinful men, be sentenced, and executed, but on the third day He will rise again.'"

8. As the women listened, they remembered what Jesus had said.

9. Then they took off from the tomb and raced back to Jerusalem to the place where the eleven disciples, together with a few others, were staying. And when they got there, they told them all the things that had happened to them.

10. Now the women who brought the good news to the disciples were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, the mother of the younger James, and a couple of other women who had been with them.

11. But to the disciples the whole thing was ridiculous. They didn't believe a thing

the women told them, but the women insisted it was true.

12. Finally, Peter decided to check it out for himself and took off for the tomb. When he got there, he stooped down and went inside. There he saw the linen burial sheets neatly folded and laid to one side. Astounded and stunned at what he saw, he quickly made his way back to the city, wondering what had happened.

13. **That** afternoon, two followers of Jesus left Jerusalem and headed for a little village called Emmaus about seven miles away.

14. As they walked along, they talked about all the things that had happened the last few days in Jerusalem.

15. And while they were talking together trying to figure out why these things happened, Jesus suddenly appeared on the road behind them. And when they sensed that He was there, they turned around and invited this stranger to walk along with them.

16. But He kept them from recognizing Him.

17. So He joined in their conversation and said, "You seem very sad. Would you mind telling me what you were talking about that made you feel this way?"

18. Cleopas answered and said, "You haven't heard? You must be a stranger in these parts. People everywhere are talking about the things that happened in Jerusalem these last few days."

19. Jesus said, "What things are you referring to?" And they said, "Haven't you heard about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a mighty prophet of God? He worked great miracles and fearlessly preached wherever He went.

20. But the chief priests and the city fathers had Him arrested, tried Him, and turned Him over to the Romans for crucifixion.

21. We had put all our hopes in Him as the Messiah. We fully believed that He would be the One who would redeem Israel's shame and deliver us from the Romans. And all this happened three days ago right here in Jerusalem.

22. Now to make things worse, some of our women went to His tomb early this

morning, and what they saw really made us sad.

23. They said they found the tomb empty and His body gone. But they were excited and ran all the way back to Jerusalem because they said they had seen some angels who told them that He had risen from the dead and was alive.

24. But we didn't believe them. So some of our group went to the tomb to check it out for them-selves and found that what the women had said was true. The only thing they didn't see were angels and there was no sight of Him alive anywhere."

25. Then Jesus said to them, "I'm sorry you feel so sad, but there's really no reason for you to feel this way. You need to understand and believe what the prophets predicted, then you'll feel better.

26. The Messiah needed to suffer this way because this shows His real glory."

27. Then, beginning with Moses and the writings of all the prophets, He explained to them the meaning of their predictions which spoke of Himself. He did this because He knew their faith needed to be rooted in the Scriptures and not in an experience.

28. By this time, they were approaching the little village of Emmaus, and it looked to these two followers as if this stranger was going to walk on.

29. So they urged Him to stay, and said, "Look, it'll be dark pretty soon, and it's dangerous out there, so why don't you stay overnight with us? Then in the morning we can leave together." He agreed and went on with them to the place where they were planning to stay.

30. When they got there and sat down to eat, they asked Him to offer the blessing. So He took one of the small loaves of bread in His hands, asked the blessing, and then broke the little loaf and passed it to them.

31. As soon as He did that, their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him. But He disappeared.

32. They looked at each other and said, "No wonder our hearts burned within us when He talked to us along the way and explained all the prophecies to us! He's the Lord! He's risen! He's alive!"

33. They jumped up from the table and took off for Jerusalem. When they got to the place where the eleven disciples, together with some of the others, were staying, they found them excited and saying to each other,

34. "The Lord is alive! He is risen from the dead! Peter has seen Him!"

35. Then the two followers shared their testimony and told the group what had happened to them. They told them how Jesus had walked with them all the way to Emmaus, how He had explained all the prophecies to them, and how they had finally recognized Him by the way He asked the blessing and broke the bread.

36. And while they were still telling their story, suddenly Jesus stood there in the room and said, "Peace, peace be with all of you."

37. But everyone there was terrified at His presence. They didn't know how to respond, because they thought He was a spirit.

38. Then Jesus said, "Why are you so afraid? Why are all these thoughts racing through your minds?"

39. Look at my hands and feet. It's really me. And if you still don't believe it, then come and feel me. A spirit doesn't have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

40. Then He showed them His hands and feet which were healed, but scarred.

41. When they still hesitated to believe that He had risen in the flesh, He said to them, "Do you have anything to eat?"

42. They handed Him some bread, a piece of fish, and for dessert a small piece of honeycomb.

43. So He sat down and ate it.

44. Then He said to them, "This is what

I've been trying to tell you all along when I was with you before. Everything written about me in the Scriptures (beginning with the writings of Moses and continuing with the prophecies—including the Psalms) had to be fulfilled."

45. He also gave them insight into the meaning of the Scriptures and helped them to understand what His mission here had been all about.

46. Then He said to them, "The Messiah had to suffer, and according to the Scriptures, He would rise on the third day.

47. The purpose of this is to make repentance and forgiveness available to everyone. That's why I want you to go preach about me to every country in the world, starting right here in Jerusalem.

48. You are the only ones who have personally witnessed my life, death, and resurrection.

49. And I promise you that as soon as I get back to the Father, I'll send you the power you'll need to carry out your mission. So stay right here in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes on you more fully."

50. Then He led the group a little way out of Jerusalem toward Bethany. And when they got to the top of the Mount of Olives, He stopped, raised His hands, and blessed them.

51. And as He was blessing them, He slowly lifted up from the earth, and ascended to heaven.

52. Then the disciples and the others who were there worshiped Him as He went up, and then returned to Jerusalem praising God.

53. After this, they took every opportunity to go to the Temple to give thanks to God.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

CHAPTER 1

1. **Before** the beginning of everything, going further back in time than can be imagined, the "Word of God" was there. And the "Word of God" stood by the side of God. And the Word was fully God.

2. There never was a time when the "Word of God" was not with God.

3. All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made.

4. He is the Source of life, and His own life here on earth was the Light that brought spiritual hope to all men.

5. This Light was seen among us and shone into our moral darkness; yet the dark minds of men planned to extinguish this Light, but did not succeed.

6. Now a man appeared whose name was John. He was sent by God.

7. He came to tell people about this Light so that they would have a chance to believe.

8. He wasn't that Light, but was sent to point to it.

9. The Light that was to shine on all mankind had not yet come.

10. Finally He came. He came to our world, this very world He created; but the world did not even recognize Him.

11. He came to His very own people, yet they did not recognize Him.

12. But to those who did recognize Him, He promised to give them power to become sons of God if they would believe in Him, accept Him as their Lord, and participate in His mission.

13. This kind of character transformation is like being born again, not because of a man's spiritual heritage, or his bloodline, or his own willpower to change his own behavior, but because of the power of God.

14. So the Word of God did become a man and lived among us. We saw that Spiritual Light with our own eyes and recognized it as divine. His life was gracious and kind and full of light and truth.

15. This is the Man of whom John witnessed when he said to the people, "This is the One I've been telling you about when

I told you that He who will come after me should be listened to; because even though He's younger than I am, He existed even before I was born."

16. It was from His spiritual overflow that we've all been blessed, receiving graciousness upon graciousness.

17. Now as important as Moses is, he could give us only the law, but graciousness and overflowing truth came to us through Jesus Christ.

18. No one has ever seen God face to face except the Son of God, who came to us directly from the Father, and He came to show us what the Father is like.

19. This is in harmony with John's witness to the Jews when the priests and Levites from Jerusalem came to the Jordan where he was preaching and asked him, "Who are you?"

20. He wasn't the kind of a man who was afraid to profess his faith or to deny it if it was wrong, so he said, "If you think I'm claiming to be the Messiah, I'm not."

21. They said, "Well, who are you then? Are you Elijah come back from heaven?" He said, "No." "Are you the great prophet that Moses said would come to guide us and whom everyone is waiting for?" He said, "No, I'm not."

22. Again they asked, "Who are you then? We need to have an answer for those who sent us out here to see you. What do you have to say about yourself?"

23. He said, "I am just a voice in the desert with a message as urgent as Elijah's when he said, 'Smooth out the road for the Lord. The King is coming.'"

24. Now the ones asking John these questions had been sent by the Pharisees.

25. So they kept on asking and said, "Why are you baptizing people if you're not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor that prophet whom Moses said would come? Who gave you authority to do this?"

26. John said, "I'm only baptizing people with water, which has no power in itself to transform lives, but there is a Man among you in the crowd whom you don't even know.

27. He is the One who has power to

change people's lives. His public ministry will begin after mine ends, but He is more important than I am. In fact, I don't even feel worthy to buckle His sandals."

28. Now all these things happened near Bethany by the Jordan River where John was preaching and baptizing.

29. The next day, when John saw Jesus pressing through the crowd and coming straight toward him to be baptized, he pointed at Him and called out for everyone to hear, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who will take away the sins of the world!" Then Jesus came out of the crowd and, like others, was baptized by John, and from there He went into the wilderness to fast and pray.

30. From then on John kept telling the people, "This is the One I told you about when I said, 'After me a Man will come who ranks much higher than I, because even though He's younger, He existed before I was even born.'

31. I also told you that even though I had never met the Messiah, I would point Him out to you when He came to me to be baptized. And when He came, I did just that.

32. Now, when I baptized Him, I saw the Holy Spirit coming down from heaven in the form of a dove hovering just over His head.

33. Before that day, I had no idea what the Messiah would look like, but God, who commissioned me to preach, told me, 'The Man over whom the Holy Spirit will hover after He's baptized is the Messiah. You baptize the people with water, but when He begins His ministry, He will baptize people with the Holy Spirit.'

34. I'm telling you what I heard and what I saw. Now I want to tell you that this Man, whom I pointed out to you, is the Messiah, the Son of God."

35. Early the next morning as John was standing there with two of his disciples,

36. he spotted Jesus walking through the crowds of people. John pointed to Jesus and called out saying, "Look! There He is! The Lamb of God!"

37. Then two of John's disciples who were standing nearby also spotted Jesus and went to join Him.

38. When they caught up with Jesus, He stopped, turned around, and said, "Why are you following me? What do you expect to get from me?" And they said, "Rabbi (meaning teacher), where are you staying? We would like to talk to you. Could we follow you home?"

39. Jesus answered and said, "Come along and see." So they followed Him to where He was staying and talked with Him all day until about four o'clock that afternoon.

40. Now one of these two disciples who had been listening carefully to John and who followed Jesus home that day was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. I was the other one.

41. The first thing that Andrew did after he left the place where Jesus was staying was to go find his brother. When he found him, he said, "We have found the Messiah! He's here! Come, let me take you to Him."

42. So Andrew led Peter to Jesus. When Jesus saw him, He said, "Simon, I'm happy to meet you. From now on you'll be called Peter." (The name Peter means a rolling pebble.)

43. The next day, Jesus decided to go north into Galilee. On the way He saw Philip and called out to Him, "Philip, come, follow me."

44. Now Philip was from nearby Bethsaida, the same town that Andrew and Peter were from.

45. So he rushed home to find his friend, Nathaniel. When he found him, he said, "Nathaniel, we've found Him! We found the One about whom Moses and the prophets wrote! His name is Jesus and He's from Nazareth. He's the son of Joseph, the carpenter."

46. Nathaniel said, "Don't get so excited. How can the Messiah come from a no-good place like Nazareth? Don't be fooled." Philip answered and said, "Then come and see for yourself."

47. So Nathaniel followed Philip. When Jesus met Nathaniel, He said, "Yes, you are one of those Israelites in whom is not an ounce of deceit. Welcome to the group."

48. Nathaniel said, "How do you know about me?" Jesus answered, "Before Philip even found where you were, I saw you

resting under a fig tree having your devotional."

49. Nathaniel was shocked and said, "Teacher, you must be the Son of God to have seen me there. You must be the King of Israel!"

50. Jesus looked at him and said, "Because I said that I saw you sitting under a fig tree having your devotional, is that why you believe who I am? Soon you'll see even greater things on which to hang your faith."

51. When you see these things, you'll know that heaven has opened its doors to men and that angels are going back and forth bringing me power to carry out my mission."

CHAPTER 2

1. Now three days after John the Baptist had publicly pointed out Jesus to be the Messiah, Jesus went to a wedding in Cana of Galilee in which His mother, Mary, had a part because she was related to the bride and groom.

2. It was because of this that Jesus, along with the five disciples who were now following Him, was invited.

3. While He was at the wedding, the family ran out of their best vintage grape juice. His mother, Mary, came to Him and said, "Jesus, they're all out of their choice drink. Do you have any idea what we can do to help solve their problem?"

4. Jesus answered her by saying, "Mother, I respect you very much, but why are you urging me to solve their problem? I know you would like me to work a miracle. But it's not right for me to show myself off as your son. Forgive me, but only when my Father chooses the appropriate moment will I do so."

5. Mary understood and did not lose her faith in Him, but she turned to the waiters and said, "Whatever my Son asks you to do, be sure to do it."

6. Now there were six pottery jars nearby, holding about thirty gallons of water each.

7. When Jesus noticed that the lack of refreshments would soon affect the wedding and embarrass the bride and groom, He turned to the waiters and said, "Fill

these water jars to the rim." They did.

8. Then He said to them, "Take a glass of this water to the master of ceremonies and set it down in front of Him." When they poured out the water, it wasn't water but fresh grape juice.

9. When the master of ceremonies tasted the new grape juice, he was so delighted that he didn't even ask where it came from but immediately went over to see the bridegroom and said,

10. "Everyone knows that at a wedding you serve the best vintage grape juice first; and when people are happy and enjoying themselves, then you start serving the less expensive drink. But just taste this new grape juice. It's wonderful! You've kept the best till last!"

11. This was the beginning of His life of miracles, starting right there in Cana of Galilee. This also showed who Jesus was and convinced those five disciples that He was the Messiah.

12. After the wedding, Jesus and His disciples went with His mother and His step-brothers as far as Capernaum, where He rested for a few days.

13. Now, the Jews were soon to celebrate their Passover, so Jesus, like many others, made His way up to Jerusalem.

14. When He arrived, He found the entrance of the Temple filled with people buying and selling animals for sacrifice. Some were selling cattle, others sheep, and still others doves to those who couldn't afford to buy anything larger. The money exchangers were also on hand because the Temple tax had to be paid in Jewish coins.

15. Then the spirit of Jesus was moved by what He saw. So He picked up some discarded pieces of rope, made them into a multi-cord whip, and told the sellers and money changers to get out. When some hesitated, He took hold of the corner of their tables and tipped them over, money and all.

16. As he went through the Temple courtyard with the whip in His hands, He said to those selling the animals and doves, "Take these things out of here! Don't make my Father's house a place of merchandise and extortion!"

17. His disciples recalled what the Scrip-

ture had prophesied about the Messiah, "The zeal for your honor and your house has eaten me up!"

18. When the noise and confusion had subsided, the Jewish leaders asked Jesus, "What right do you have to do this? Who gave you this authority? Who are you anyway?"

19. Jesus answered, "Destroy my temple and in three days I will rebuild it. Then you will know who I am and you'll know who gave me the authority to do this."

20. They said, "Forty-six years were spent in building this Temple and you think you can rebuild it in three days?"

21. Jesus was talking about His body temple, but they thought He was talking about the Temple itself.

22. After Jesus had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered what he had said that day to the Jewish leaders. Their faith in the prophecies and in what Jesus had taught them was made that much stronger.

23. This Passover experience happened at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. By now, many in Jerusalem already believed Him to be the Messiah because of the miracles He had done.

24. But Jesus did not put His confidence in people, because He knew what human nature was like and how unpredictable it was.

25. Nor did He need anyone to tell Him what people were thinking about Him, because He could read their minds.

CHAPTER 3

1. Now there was a leader among the Jews named Nicodemus who was a highly respected Pharisee.

2. Wanting to see Jesus, he made an appointment to meet Him at night. When they met, Nicodemus said, "Teacher, we know that God has sent you because no one can work miracles as you can unless God is with him."

3. Jesus answered, "I want to point out to you that miracle-working alone is not evidence that the kingdom of God is here. Unless a person is born again, he cannot possibly know the value of God's kingdom, much less have a part in it."

4. Nicodemus said, "How can a man enter into his mother's womb a second time and be born again? How can a man who is already old be reborn and start life all over again? That's impossible."

5. Jesus said, "You're right. But I'm not speaking of physical birth. I'm speaking of spiritual birth. Unless a man's spiritual nature receives life through the Holy Spirit and is then willing to give public witness to this fact, whether by baptism or by some other means, he cannot possibly have a part in God's kingdom."

6. That which is physical is one thing, and that which is spiritual is another. A person can be born into this world and yet not be born of the Spirit.

7. So don't be shocked when I tell you that you yourself must yet be born again and transformed on the inside before you can have part in God's kingdom.

8. How this happens is beyond logic or ritual. It's an experience, like taking a walk on a windy day; you can hear it blowing through the trees, and you can see the effects of it on the leaves, but you can't see the wind itself or get a hold of it to stop it from going. That's how it is with the person who is born spiritually; he can't point to something people can see and get a hold of and say, 'This is what caused me to be different.'"

9. Nicodemus sat there stunned and said, "How can such a thing be?"

10. Jesus said to him, "You're one of the leading minds in Israel, and you don't know what I'm talking about?"

11. I'm telling you what I personally know and what I've seen happen in the lives of others, and you still hesitate to believe me.

12. Now if I'm explaining it to you with things you're familiar with, like the effects of the wind, and you still can't grasp it, how could you possibly grasp it if I explained it to you with things you haven't even seen?

13. No one has lived in heaven and then come to live on earth except the Son of God. He lived there before He was born here, and He has come to make spiritual things simple.

14. The miracle of the new birth was

taught in the Old Testament when Moses put a brass serpent on a makeshift cross and held it up for people to look at. And all those who looked up at it in faith were healed of their snakebites and the venom inside of them had lost its power. It was the power of God symbolized by the cross that overcame the power of the snake. That power didn't come from the cross that Moses made, but from the Son of God who would come and die on the cross.

15. And He will be placed on the cross and be crucified. He will be lifted up between heaven and earth for all to see, and those who look to Him in faith will be healed of the snakebite of sin and live forever.

16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son to come and die, so people who look to Him in faith will not perish but be healed and receive eternal life.

17. God didn't send His Son down here to condemn people for their sins, but to help them and heal them.

18. And he who trusts the Son of God and believes what He says does not have to live under a cloud of condemnation. It's the person who doesn't believe what the Son of God says who can never be healed.

19. This is what condemns people--their lack of response to the light of truth about God's Son, not the fact that they were bitten by the snake of sin. The Son of God is like a physician who has come to assure the people that heaven's prescription for sin will work. But, unfortunately, people prefer to work their own cures and trust in their own medicine, and so they turn hope into hopelessness and light into darkness.

20. Somehow people think they know how to cure themselves even if their sickness is terminal. They don't like to be told that their nature is evil and that what they're doing won't help them.

21. But those who are honest with themselves will come to the Son of God for help. They want something that will really change them, and they're willing to find out whether the prescription that the Son of God is writing works or not."

22. **After** the interview with Nicodemus, Jesus decided to stay with His dis-

ciples in Judea and let them preach and baptize as John did.

23. In fact, John was not far away from where they were. He was preaching and baptizing people near Salim because the water was deeper. That made baptizing easier.

24. This was just before John was arrested and thrown into prison.

25. About this same time, some of John's disciples had been discussing with the Jews the subject of purification by ritual. So this was very much on their minds.

26. When they heard that Jesus was allowing His disciples to baptize, they came to see for themselves and then back to John and said, "Teacher, the one whom you baptized in Jordan, the One who you said was the Messiah, is allowing His disciples to baptize not too far from here, and everyone is going over there."

27. John answered, "The success I've had was a gift to me from heaven. I didn't create it myself.

28. You yourselves are witnesses to the fact that I told everyone who asked me whether I was the Messiah that I was not, but that I was only a messenger sent ahead to prepare the way for Him.

29. The arrangement is like a wedding. The bride belongs to the bridegroom, but the bestman stands by and is happy for both of them, because he detects a note of love in the bridegroom's voice.

30. No, the Messiah must increase and I must decrease.

31. You see, the Messiah has come down from above, so He's above everyone. But I am of this world and I can only speak with human authority, but the Messiah can speak with heavenly authority.

32. He can speak about things He knows firsthand and yet how few follow Him or believe what He's saying, much less accept Him as the Son of God.

33. But those who are going to Him and are accepting Him, they are living witnesses that what I said about Him is true.

34. You see, He can speak with certainty because, not only did God send Him to us on a special mission, but He also entrusted

Him with the full power of the Holy Spirit.

35. The Father trusts Him totally because He's His Son. In fact, the Father trusts Him so much that He has turned everything in this world over to Him.

36. That's why trusting the Son is so important. And the person who does so will then have within himself the seeds of eternal life, and the person who does not trust the Son can never be given eternal life but will have to suffer the consequences of sin."

CHAPTER 4

1. When Jesus heard about the jealousy of John's disciples and the concern the Pharisees had over His rising popularity and the large number of people His disciples were baptizing ^{JOHN 1}

2. (although Jesus Himself baptized no one),

3. He left Judea and headed north into Galilee.

4. On His way He decided to travel through the province of Samaria.

5. On one especially hot day, He stopped at a well near the little town of Sychar, which was located on the land originally owned by Jacob and which he in turn had given to Joseph.

6. To this day the well is still known as Jacob's well. Jesus was tired and sat on the little stone wall around the well to rest. (It was about noon when all this took place.)

7. While He was resting there, a Samaritan woman came to the well for a bucket of water. Jesus said to her, "Would you let me have a drink after you fill your bucket? I'm so thirsty and I have no way to reach down into the well to get a drink."

8. He was alone when this happened because His disciples had gone into town to buy some food.

9. Then the woman said, "How come you, a Jew, ask me for a drink of water when the Jews would rather die from thirst than to take a drink from us? And you're asking a Samaritan woman, no less?"

10. Jesus answered and said, "If you knew who it was who was asking you for a drink of water and what water He could give you, you would be asking Him for a drink. He could give you the best water

you ever tasted."

11. The woman said, "You just told me that you had no way to get water because this well is too deep, so from which well around here are you going to get this special water?"

12. Besides, this water is the best there is. The patriarch Jacob gave us this well, you know, and it has not only good water, but also special meaning to us because he, his family, and his cattle drank from it."

13. Jesus looked at her and said, "The water from this well may be good water, but like all other water, after you drink it, you'll get thirsty again.

14. The water which I can give to you is a special kind. Once you drink it, you'll never be thirsty again. It will constantly bubble up inside of you like a mountain spring."

15. The woman said, "That's the kind of water I need! Then I'll never have to come back to this well because I'll never get thirsty again!"

16. Jesus became more pointed in His conversation and said, "Why don't you go and call your husband so that I can offer this special water to both of you?"

17. The woman answered and said, "I'm not married." Jesus said, "I know you're not.

18. You've been married five times, and the man you're living with now is not your husband."

19. The woman gasped and said, "How do you know all this? You don't happen to be a prophet, do you?"

20. Now, if you think you're going to win me to Judaism, forget it. Our fathers have been worshiping God in their own way for centuries, but you Jews always argue that you have the true religion and that Jerusalem is the center of everything."

21. Jesus answered and said, "Believe me, the time is rapidly coming when Jerusalem will be destroyed, and the Jews will then realize that people can worship God anywhere.

22. To worship God, you don't have to be in a particular place, nor does it mean blindly following some tradition passed down by our fathers. But it is true that He who brings salvation will come from

among the Jewish people.

23. Aside from that, people can worship God anywhere, because true worship is a matter of the heart and has to do with our attitude. This is the kind of people that God is looking for to worship Him.

24. You see, God is concerned about the spiritual part of our lives and about how honest and sincere we are, not where we worship Him."

25. The woman said, "I don't understand everything, but I know that someday the Messiah will come and He'll tell us what is right."

26. Then Jesus said, "I am the Messiah."

27. Just then His disciples came back from town and were shocked to see Him talking with a woman, especially a Samaritan. Yet not one of them said anything, nor did they ask Him why He had talked to her.

28. The woman could sense that she wasn't welcome. Yet, thrilled because of her conversation with Jesus, she left her water bucket and ran back to town, telling people,

29. "Come and see a stranger who talks like a prophet. He told me everything I ever did and knew my past like a book. I think He's the Messiah!"

30. Their curiosity aroused by what the woman told them, large crowds came out to see Him.

31. While the woman was urging people to come see, the disciples were urging Jesus to eat, saying, "Master, we know you're hungry. Please have something to eat."

32. But He said to them, "I've been eating all the while you were gone and you have no idea how good it tasted."

33. Then the disciples asked each other, "Do you think that someone brought Him something to eat while we were gone?"

34. Jesus, overhearing their conversation, said, "The food I'm talking about is the happiness that comes from doing God's will and seeing people respond."

35. When you talk about God's work, never say, 'Four months from now it'll be harvest time.' The spiritual harvest is always ripe. Just look around to see how people are longing for the Word of God,

how they're reaching out for something to give them faith and courage and hope.

36. And those who help these people will be filled with heavenly joy when they see them give their hearts to God and receive eternal life. So in the end, the sowers and the reapers will rejoice together over the harvest.

37. But you can enjoy the sowing and reaping now.

38. You've already experienced the thrill of reaping when you invited people to give their hearts to God and they did. You were reaping the harvest of the seed which someone else sowed, and you enjoyed its fruit."

39. Now when the Samaritan woman told the townspeople about Jesus, many of them believed her and were eager to see the man who claimed to be the Messiah.

40. Just as Jesus and His disciples finished eating, seemingly the whole town came out to see Jesus and to talk with Him. They begged Him to stay with them. He agreed and stayed the better part of two days.

41. Many believed that He was the Messiah because of how He treated them and also because of what He said.

42. The townspeople said to the Samaritan woman, "We believe Him to be the Messiah, not because of what you said about Him, although we do appreciate you letting us know that He was here, but because we've heard Him ourselves. We now know why you were so excited. Without a doubt He is the Messiah, the Savior of the world!"

43. After His stay in the Samaritan town, Jesus continued on His way north to Galilee and on toward Nazareth,

44. even though He knew that generally a prophet receives more respect elsewhere than in his own hometown.

45. When He crossed the border into Galilee, people were glad to see Him, because many of them had seen the miracles He had done at the recent feast in Jerusalem.

46. Finally Jesus arrived at the town of Cana where He had turned water into unfermented wine. Word spread to nearby Capernaum that He was in Cana, and a

nobleman whose son was sick heard the news.

47. He decided to go talk to Jesus about his sick son. When he met Jesus, he asked Him if He would accompany him to his house and heal his son who was dying.

48. Jesus said to the nobleman, "You're asking me to come to your house not only to heal your son but also to test me to see whether I'm really the Son of God or not. And if I can heal your son, then you'll believe."

49. The nobleman answered and said, "Sir, I can see that you are very perceptive. You are right. I'm testing you, but please forgive me for that. Just come and heal my son. He's dying and he needs you."

50. Jesus said, "You can go home now. Your son is healed." The man believed Jesus and confidently headed for home.

51. He purposely delayed getting home until the next morning. As he neared the house, his servants saw him and came running to tell him that his son was well.

52. He asked them what time the boy started feeling better. They said, "Yesterday at about one o'clock in the afternoon."

53. The man then realized that his son was healed the very instant Jesus had told him to go back home. This convinced him beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was the Messiah. Then he told his family about Jesus, and they all believed.

54. This was the second major miracle which Jesus had done in Galilee since the beginning of His ministry. This time, however, He had come up from Jerusalem instead of coming from the desert.

CHAPTER 5

1. **Sometime** after this, there was another Jewish festival, and Jesus, as did so many others, made His way down to Jerusalem.

2. Near the sheep gate, leading into the city, was the pool of Bethesda. It was surrounded by a roofed patio with columns and arches.

3. Around these arches all kinds of sick and handicapped people waited for the sudden and mysterious moving of the otherwise quiet water.

4. The people believed that periodically

an angel would come down from heaven and disturb the water, and the first person in after the movement of the water would be healed.

5. One of those who waited was a man who had been partially paralyzed for thirty-eight years.

6. Now, as Jesus was walking along these patios next to the pool, He saw this man lying on his straw mat. Jesus knew by looking at him that he had been sick for a long time. So He stopped and said to the man, "Would you like to be healed?"

7. The sick man barely looked up, but straining his voice to talk, said, "Sir, there is no one here to help me into the water at the right time. And, when I try to make it to the pool by myself, the others push and shove and always get in before I do. So there's no use. I'm almost ready to give up."

8. Jesus looked at him and said, "I'm not here to help you into the water. I'm here to tell you to stand up on your feet and walk. Then roll up your mat, tuck it under your arm, and go home."

9. The man didn't even question Jesus. He just willed to do what Jesus said, put forth the effort to stand up, and as he did so, he found that he was healed. Once on his feet, he reached down, rolled up his mat, and then turned to thank Jesus. But Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. So the man tucked his mat under his arm and headed for home.

10. Now this was on the Sabbath day, so when the Jewish leaders saw the man carrying his mat, they stopped him and said, "Don't you know that today is the Sabbath and that it's against the law to be carrying your bed?"

11. The man answered, "The One who healed me told me to roll up my mat, pick it up, and go home."

12. Then they asked him, "Who asked you to do that?"

13. The man couldn't answer because he really didn't know who had healed him. By the time he had rolled up his mat and turned to thank Jesus, He was gone.

14. Later that day, Jesus saw the man in the Temple thanking God for healing him. So He walked up to him and said, "It's

good to see you well again. But be careful. Don't return to your old lifestyle of sinning, or you might end up with something worse than what you had before."

15. Then the man went to the Jewish leaders and joyfully told them that it was Jesus who had healed him and had told him to take up his mat and go home.

16. When the Jews heard this report, they followed Jesus from then on, looking for a chance to arrest and execute Him as a Sabbathbreaker.

17. Every time they confronted Him with the question of Sabbathkeeping, however, He would say, "My Father does good on the Sabbath, and so do I."

18. This answer only enraged the Jews. They were more determined than ever to execute Him, not only as a Sabbathbreaker, but also because He made Himself equal with God by claiming that God was His Father.

19. Jesus responded to the charge of Sabbathbreaking by saying, "The Son of God does nothing independent of the Father. Everything He does is by the Father's consent, and He does only those things which the Father Himself would do if He were here.

20. The Father loves the Son and gladly tells Him what things He would do if He were here. I'm sure that the Father will tell the Son to do even greater miracles than healing. You'll be amazed at what you will see.

21. Whatever the Father can do, the Son can do. If the Father can raise the dead, the Son can, too.

22. In fact, the Father has turned the judgment of all peoples over to the Son.

23. The Father wants all men to respect the Son just as they respect Him. Those who do not honor and respect the Son are not honoring the Father who sent Him.

24. Those who listen to what I'm saying and believe that the Father has sent me will escape everlasting annihilation and, instead, receive eternal life, because the seeds of death have been replaced by the seeds of life.

25. Actually, the time will come, and in one sense is here now, when the dead will respond to the Son of God's voice and live.

26. Just as the Father is the Source of all health and life, so the Son is, too.

27. The Father has given the Son permission to do this and to be judge, because the Son is not only divine but also human. He understands what it's like to live here.

28. Don't be surprised at anything you see the Son do, because in the end He will raise all those who are dead, and those in the grave will hear His voice and come to life.

29. Those who accept the Son and follow His example of obedience and of doing good, even on the Sabbath, will be resurrected and given eternal life. Those who reject the Son, and whose main interest consists in following religious rules and regulations instead of being interested in helping others, will only be resurrected to see God and then be annihilated forever.

30. Now as a human being, I couldn't judge people except by what I hear them say and see them do. But my judgment is more than human, and it's fair because it's in harmony with my Father's judgment, who reads every man's heart. And He shares His judgment with me because He is the One who sent me here.

31. If as a human being I would try to come to certain conclusions about others or even about myself, my conclusions could be wrong.

32. But Someone else confirms my conclusions and approves what I do, namely the Father. So what He says about others and about me must be true.

33. Also, John the Baptist, who was a prophet, told you the truth about me.

34. I'm not talking about human opinion but about heavenly confirmation. I'm telling you these things not to boast, but to help you.

35. John the Baptist was a burning and shining light. You were happy about His mission and rejoiced in what He said.

36. Now I would like you to rejoice even more because I'm giving you more striking evidence of the truth about me than John gave you. I do what my Father tells me to do. My works plus my miracles are evidence that the Father has sent me.

37. This is how the Father shows His approval of what I do. It's incredible that

you can't seem to hear Him speaking through me, nor see Him in what I do.

38. The reason for this is that the Scripture does not really have priority in your life, neither do you want to believe what I'm telling you.

39. You are constantly studying the Scriptures, and you think that by so doing, you have eternal life, but these same Scriptures talk about me.

40. You refuse to believe who I am, so there's no chance of your ever receiving eternal life.

41. I don't do things just to receive people's approval. I'm not here to please their fancy.

42. As far as you men are concerned, the love of God isn't really in you.

43. I come in the Father's name backed by His credentials and you don't accept me. But if others were to come and make similar claims and work miracles under your direction, you would accept them without hesitation because they would be under your control.

44. How is it possible then for you to exercise faith in God if you're constantly reinforcing each other's claims and seeking approval from one another?

45. Please don't think that I'm against you or that I'm your accuser. The one who is accusing you is Moses, whom you almost worship as if he were God.

46. If you really believed everything Moses said, you would believe what I'm saying because the writings of Moses talk about my coming.

47. But if you don't believe everything Moses said, how are you going to believe what I say?"

CHAPTER 6

1. **After** this confrontation, Jesus went up into Galilee and then decided to cross the Lake of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias, over to the other side.

2. Soon a huge crowd was following Him because of the miracles that He did and the people that He healed.

3. After days of teaching and healing, Jesus and His disciples looked for a secluded spot to get away from the crowd. They climbed a hill and made themselves

comfortable.

4. This was about the time of the Jewish Passover, which is an important feast day for the Jews.

5. From where Jesus sat, He could see large numbers of people making their way to Jerusalem. Many of them stopped to see Jesus and soon a large crowd had gathered. Jesus turned to Philip and said, "These people have a long way to go and will soon be hungry. Where can we get food to feed them?"

6. (Jesus asked Philip this question to test his faith. He already knew how He was going to feed these people.)

7. Philip answered Jesus and said, "I don't think that even two hundred day's wages could buy enough bread to feed all these people, even if we allowed only one slice per person, and there's no way we can come up with all that money."

8. Then Peter's brother Andrew, who overheard the conversation, came up and said,

9. "There's a boy here who has five little loaves of bread and two small fish, but how can that feed all these people even if we add to it the bread we can afford to buy?"

10. Jesus said, "Go and tell the people to sit down and to make themselves comfortable." Now there were about five thousand men in the crowd and many of them with families.

11. Then Jesus asked for the lad's five little loaves and two fish, offered a prayer of thanksgiving to His heavenly Father, and started passing out bread and fish to His disciples to give to the people.

12. They passed them out as fast as they could. There was so much food that everyone had plenty to eat. When the meal was finished, Jesus said to His disciples, "Let's gather the food left over so that it isn't wasted."

13. After picking up the bread and fish left over, they found there were twelve baskets full of food which the people couldn't eat.

14. Then, because of the miracle, the men in the crowd, encouraged by the disciples, said to each other, "There's no doubt that this Man is the prophet we've been

waiting for." So they decided to force Jesus into being their king.

15. Jesus, sensing what was in their hearts, dismissed the crowd and told them to go home. He spoke with such authority that they all obeyed. Then He climbed up a nearby hill to be alone and to pray.

16. After the crowd had dispersed and all the people had gone, the disciples made their way down to the shore.

17. It was late in the afternoon, so they decided to take their boats and head back to Capernaum. They were delayed in getting started, however, because they were arguing and blaming each other for their failure to make Jesus king. Finally, in their self-pity, they pushed off, without Jesus, just as it was getting dark.

18. They hadn't traveled very far when a sudden storm hit, and soon the waves were tossing their boats around like matchsticks.

19. They strained at the oars trying to get over to Capernaum, but after hours of rowing they had covered only about three miles. Suddenly, in the middle of that stormy sea, they saw someone walking on the water, coming straight toward them. They thought this was an omen of death and began shaking with fright.

20. It was Jesus. He called out to them, "Don't be afraid. It is I."

21. With glad hearts, they welcomed Him into one of the boats. As soon as He took hold and stepped in, the wind stopped. The next moment they were on the shore of Capernaum.

22. Some of the people who had been with Jesus the previous afternoon had remained on that side of the lake. When they woke the next morning and realized that Jesus was gone, they wondered how He had gotten away, for they had seen the disciples leave without Him.

23. And the other boats, which were also from Tiberias, had left when the disciples did. So there was no boat by which he could pass to the other side.

24. When the people realized that Jesus and the disciples were not coming back, they got into the boats that had returned and went over to Capernaum to look for Jesus.

25. Soon they found Him and asked, "Teacher, how did you get across the lake?"

26. Jesus answered, "What is more important is why you're so eager to find me. You seem to be more interested in my feeding you than in what yesterday's miracle was telling you about the kingdom of God.

27. Don't only work for food that spoils, but work for food that gives you eternal life. This is the food that only the Son of God can give you because the Father has put His mark of approval on Him."

28. Then they asked Him, saying, "What should we do to be approved of God?"

29. Jesus said, "The first thing to do is to trust the One whom God has sent."

30. They said, "What tangible sign can you give us so that we can know that you are the One sent by God? Show us, and then we'll trust you.

31. Our forefathers were given a tangible sign when in the wilderness God rained down food from heaven. And the Scripture says, 'He provided them bread from heaven so they wouldn't go hungry.'"

32. Then Jesus said, "Let me explain. In Moses' time, God provided your forefathers with food because they were in the desert, but my Father was also eager then and is eager now to provide you with food for your soul.

33. And this spiritual manna has now come down from heaven and is found in the One whom the Father has sent."

34. Then they said, "Lord, if you have that spiritual manna, give it to us, and we'll be glad to eat it."

35. Jesus said, "I am that manna. I am God's bread from heaven and the One who gives life to the soul. The person who accepts me will never hunger for any other spiritual food. He who trusts me will never thirst after anything else.

36. The problem is that, although you saw me provide for your physical needs yesterday, you still don't trust me to provide for your spiritual needs.

37. All whom my Father can bring to me will show it by trusting me, and I'll be glad to feed the faith of those who trust me even just a little bit.

38. I came down from heaven not to exert my authority, but to carry out my Father's wishes.

39. My Father doesn't want me to overlook one person whom He has been able to bring to me for spiritual food. And He has given me permission to resurrect that person at the end of time.

40. This is the Father's overwhelming desire and the reason for which He has sent me: that everyone who trusts the Son will be given eternal life. I can assure you that, when the end comes, I will resurrect each and every one who has trusted me."

41. Then the Jewish leaders and others in the crowd expressed their doubts about Jesus, because He claimed to be God's bread from heaven.

42. They said to each other, "Isn't this man the adopted son of Joseph? We know His parents, where He was born, and where He grew up. How can He say He came down from heaven?"

43. Jesus spoke up and said, "You need to stop grumbling about me to one another.

44. I'm not here to force you to follow me. No one can really follow me unless he is responding with all his heart to my Father's influence on him. This is the kind of person who will be resurrected at the end of time.

45. As Isaiah the prophet said, 'God will teach everyone who is willing to be taught.' This means that everyone who is willing to be led by the Spirit will accept me.

46. Now this doesn't mean that God Himself will talk to each of you, but that He will speak to you through me, and you can trust me because I've come directly from God. I've seen and talked with Him.

47. Therefore, anyone who trusts me has already tasted eternal life.

48. I am God's bread from heaven.

49. Physical food, even though it comes down from heaven and is blessed like manna, will not guarantee you entrance into heaven. Your forefathers ate it and they died in the wilderness and never did enter Canaan.

50. The manna from heaven that really matters is the spiritual food that feeds your soul and guarantees that you have eternal

life.

51. Believe me, I am God's bread from heaven and I can guarantee you that you will live forever. And the food that I provide is for any who wants to eat, because I am come to give my life for the redemption of the whole world."

52. But the Jewish leaders and others in the crowd continued to express their doubt and said, "How can this man feed the whole world, and how can people eat Him?"

53. Then Jesus said, "I want to tell you in all sincerity, unless you feed on the same spirit that motivates me to care about you and to die for you, you can't possibly have tasted eternal life.

54. But the person who puts his confidence in me and shows the same spirit that I do has already tasted eternal life, and I will resurrect him.

55. My love for you is what keeps me going. It's food and drink to my soul.

56. And he who feeds on this kind of love is part of me and I'm part of him.

57. Just as the Father sent me and I feed on the love that motivates Him, so the person who feeds on that same love will live because of me.

58. This is the kind of manna I'm talking about, not the manna your forefathers ate and then died; the manna I'm talking about will bring a person eternal life."

59. Now this conversation between Jesus and the Jews took place in the synagogue in Capernaum.

60. And many of His followers, when they heard it, said to themselves, "This is too hard to understand. Besides, it doesn't make sense."

61. But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to them, "Are you offended by this kind of talk?

62. Now suppose you would see the Son of God ascend bodily to heaven where He came from, would you still say it doesn't make sense?

63. We are talking about a man's soul, what it feeds on, not physical nourishment. That is what I say to you. If you accept it, that is life-giving food.

64. But I know that some of you still don't trust me and believe what I say."

(Jesus knew that some of them would never understand what He was talking about or ever trust Him. In fact, He even knew from the beginning who would sell Him for thirty pieces of silver.)

65. He continued, "That's why I told you that only those who respond to the beckoning of my Father can trust me."

66. Right then many of His followers decided to leave Him.

67. Jesus turned to the twelve and said, "Are you going to leave me, too?"

68. Peter answered and said, "Lord, to whom can we go to hear words of truth which guarantee immortality? You are the only One!

69. We trust you and accept you as the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

70. Jesus said to them, "That's why I have chosen you to be my disciples, although one of you has a different spirit, a spirit that is devilish."

71. He was referring to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, because he was the one who would eventually sell Jesus for thirty pieces of silver even though he was accepted as one of the twelve.

CHAPTER 7

1. **After** these experiences of healing on the Sabbath and claiming to be God's bread from heaven, Jesus didn't dare go back down to Jerusalem, as the leaders there were making plans to have Him killed. And even in Galilee, He had to keep on the move.

2. Now when the Jewish feast of Tabernacles was at hand,

3. it looked as if Jesus had no plans to attend the feast, but His stepbrothers urged Him to go. They said, "Why don't you go down to Jerusalem and work some of the outstanding miracles you did here in Galilee? This would be a great encouragement to your followers everywhere.

4. Nobody makes the kinds of claims for himself that you do and then behaves so secretly. Men who make such claims do so openly and without fear, for the whole world to see. So if you care about us, you need to perform your miracles publicly in Jerusalem."

5. They said this because they wanted

their family to be recognized and respected, not because they believed that Jesus was the Son of God who came to die for their sins.

6. Then Jesus said to them, "When my Father tells me to go to Jerusalem, then I'll go.

7. The Jewish leaders don't hate you, but they hate me because my presence keeps reminding them that their lives are not what they should be.

8. You go to the feast, but I'm not planning to go, at least not for now, because the timing of my actions is very important."

9. So His stepbrothers left for Jerusalem while Jesus stayed up north in Galilee.

10. A short time after they left, Jesus decided to go, too, not by using the main roads as they did, but by using the smaller and less traveled side roads.

11. Meanwhile, at the feast the Jewish leaders were looking for Jesus, asking themselves, "Where is He? He should be here by now."

12. The people were also looking for Him and some said, "He's a good man." Others said, "No, He's not. He's an imposter and going around deceiving people."

13. But all these comments were made quietly because they were afraid to say anything publicly because of the Jews.

14. Now in the middle of the week-long feast, Jesus arrived in Jerusalem and went straight to the Temple and started teaching.

15. The Jewish leaders were right there listening to everything He said and were amazed at what they heard. They asked each other, "Where does this man get all this learning, having never gone to school?"

16. Jesus overheard their whispering and said, "My teachings are not something I've just thought up, but were given to me by the One who sent me.

17. Anyone can learn these same things if he is willing to listen and to carry them out in his own life. Then he'll be able to tell whether what I'm teaching is from God or not.

18. Now the person who always talks about himself and his accomplishments is

only interested in his own glory, but the person who wants to honor the one who taught him has no interest in honoring himself and will not go around deceiving people by what he says.

19. So you need to look at your own actions. Didn't Moses tell you how to act? But hardly any of you are behaving the way you ought to. If you did, you wouldn't be going around trying to kill me."

20. Some in the crowd cried out, "You're crazy! Who's trying to kill you?"

21. Jesus answered, "I healed a man on the Sabbath, and you were shocked. What for? Did I do something wrong?"

22. Look how you honor the rite of circumcision which you got from Moses. He didn't originate circumcision; he simply passed on to you what he received from his forefathers. So you think nothing of circumcising on the Sabbath.

23. Now if circumcision is important enough to do on the Sabbath so that you won't go contrary to what Moses said, why are you angry with me because I made a man well on the Sabbath? Isn't healing more important than circumcising?

24. Don't be so legalistic in your evaluation of things, but look at the larger picture."

25. A little later someone else spoke up, "Isn't this the man they want killed?"

26. He surely speaks up for someone who's on the wanted list, and they don't even stop Him from talking. Maybe the rulers have changed their minds and really think He's the Messiah.

27. But we know who He is and where He's from, so He can't be the Messiah. When the Messiah comes, nobody will know what family He's from."

28. Then Jesus stopped teaching, looked up, and called out to everyone, "Of course you all know me and where I'm from, but I didn't choose to come here without permission. The One who agreed for me to come is truthful and would not deceive anyone. You just don't know Him as I do.

29. But I know Him, because I've lived with Him and He is the One who sent me."

30. After He said this, they wanted to get their hands on Him, yet they didn't

dare touch Him because at the time it wasn't God's will for Him to die.

31. However, many believed that Jesus was the Messiah and spoke up for Him, saying, "When the Messiah comes, do you think He'll be able to do greater miracles than this Man has done?"

32. When the Pharisees who were standing nearby heard all this, they decided to send for the soldiers. They wanted to arrest Jesus before they lost their standing in the eyes of the people, because everyone knew they wanted to kill Him. They figured that the longer they waited, the more people would be convinced that He truly was the Messiah.

33. So, while the soldiers were being sent for, Jesus looked at the Pharisees and said, "I'm going to be here just a little while longer, and then I'm going back to the One who sent me.

34. That's when you'll look for me but won't be able to find me, because where I go, you can't follow."

35. The Jews asked each other, "Where do you think He's going that we can't find Him or follow Him? Do you think He's planning to go teach our people somewhere else in the Roman Empire, in Greece, maybe?"

36. What does He mean when He says, 'You'll look for me and not be able to find me and where I go you can't follow?'" So they did not arrest Him just yet.

37. On the last day of the week-long feast, Jesus, standing at one end of the Temple courtyard, called out, "If anyone is thirsty, come over here to me and I'll satisfy his thirst.

38. If anyone believes who I am, from his own soul shall flow out rivers of life-giving water just as the Scripture says."

39. By this He meant the power of the Holy Spirit flowing into and out of a person's soul. If people would accept Him as the Messiah, the Holy Spirit would come into their lives now, and would come in still greater fullness at the Feast of Pentecost after Jesus' ascension.

40. When the people heard Jesus call out to everyone as He did, some said, "There's no question that this Man is the Prophet we were looking for!"

41. Others said, "He's the Messiah!" But still others said, "The Messiah won't be a Galilean.

42. The Scripture says that the Messiah will be a descendant of David and come from Bethlehem where David was born."

43. The result was confusion over who Jesus really was.

44. Some wanted to lay their hands on Him right then and there, but nobody moved.

45. When the soldiers, who were told to keep an eye on Jesus and to take Him in custody when it would cause the least commotion, went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees without Him, they were asked, "Where is he? Didn't you arrest Him?"

46. Then the officer in charge of the Temple soldiers answered, "We never heard an ordinary man speak with such authority. So we felt we couldn't arrest Him without causing a riot."

47. When the Pharisees heard this, they were very upset and said to the officer, "Has He deceived you as He's deceived all the other people?

48. Do any of us believe that He's the Messiah?

49. The people are ignorant. They can't read the Scriptures as we can. So you can't rely on who they think the Messiah is."

50. Then Nicodemus, who was one of the Pharisees and who some time before had a night interview with Jesus, spoke up.

51. "Now doesn't our law protect the rights of people, and doesn't it forbid us to condemn anyone before we question him personally to see what he has to say?"

52. They looked at him and said, "Don't tell us that you're a follower of this Galilean. Read the Scriptures; you will find not one reference to the Messiah coming out of Galilee."

53. Then they adjourned, and everyone went to his own home.

CHAPTER 8

1. Jesus left the Temple and made His way out of the city to the top of a little hill called the Mount of Olives to spend some time in prayer.

2. Early the next morning, He went back to the Temple and sat down in the courtyard to teach, even though the week-long feast was now over. Soon a large crowd gathered around Him to listen to what He had to say.

3. While He was teaching, the scribes and Pharisees dragged in a prostitute whom they had tricked into the act of adultery so they could use her to confront Jesus. They pushed her down in front of Him and said,

4. "Master, this woman was caught in the act of committing adultery. What should we do with her?

5. Moses told us that such a person should be stoned to death. What do you say?"

6. They did this to trap Him in His own words so that they could arrest Him without causing a riot. But Jesus didn't answer right away; He simply leaned forward from where He was sitting, and, with His finger, started writing something in the dust of the pavement.

7. They continued asking Him what He thought they should do with this woman lying in front of Him, but He acted as if He didn't hear a word they were saying. Finally He straightened up, looked at them, and said, "Any of you who has never sinned, let him throw the first stone."

8. Then He leaned forward and started writing again. This time the leaders looked at what He was doing and saw traced before them their own guilt and secret sins and then noticed others reading them, too.

9. So one by one they quietly left, beginning with the older ones, until they were all gone.

10. Then Jesus straightened up and said to the woman who was still lying there expecting to hear her sentence of doom, "Where are all those who were accusing you? It looks as if they've all gone. Is there no one here to condemn you?"

11. She sat up, looked around, and said, "No, Lord, not a one." Jesus responded and said, "Neither am I going to condemn you. So you can go now, but stop living in sin."

12. Then He turned to the crowd which had been watching all this and said, "I am

the Light of the whole world, and the person who follows me will no longer have to feel his way through the darkness, but will be able to walk into the future with certainty because he is following the Light."

13. Some other Pharisees had joined the crowd by now and responded, "You keep talking about yourself and how important you are. Surely you don't expect us to trust you and to believe what you're saying?"

14. Jesus answered, "Even though I speak about myself, what I say is true. I know where I came from, who started me on my mission, and where I'm going. But you don't want to know where I came from or where I'm going, and that's why my talk bothers you."

15. All you're looking at is the outward appearance and what you can see with your eyes. By myself I pass judgment on no one,

16. but if my Father asked me to judge, my decision would be valid because then I wouldn't be making such decisions alone. You see, I and my Father do things together, and in that sense we are one.

17. Just as it says in Scripture, 'The testimony of two witnesses who agree should be accepted as true.'

18. I'm giving you my testimony and the Father is giving you His testimony through me. And from this you should know who I am."

19. Then they asked Him, "Where is your Father? We would like to meet Him." Jesus answered and said, "You don't even recognize who I am, how then would you expect to recognize my Father even if you could meet Him?"

20. This was only part of the conversation Jesus had with the Pharisees in the Temple that morning. And though He was sitting near the treasury where numerous guards were, no one tried to lay hands on Him because the time for Him to be arrested had not yet come.

21. Later that day, Jesus had another conversation with some of the Pharisees and said to them, "Soon I'll be on my way, and though you look for me, you won't be able to find me. Nor will you be able to come to where I'm going, which means

that you'll have to face up to the consequences of having rejected me."

22. The Jews said to each other, "Do you think He's planning to kill Himself? What else do you think He means when He says, 'Where I go, you can't come?'"

23. Jesus overheard their questions and said, "Your questions sound to me as though you have no concept at all of spiritual things. I don't see things the way you do because I look beyond this present world and the things around me."

24. That's why I told you, unless you start looking at things differently, you'll have to face the consequences of rejecting me and there will be no stopping them."

25. Then they asked Him, "Who are you anyway?" Jesus said, "I told you who I was at the beginning of our conversation."

26. There are many other things about me that I could tell you and many more things I could add to what my Father has said about me. As I've told you, this is what makes my testimony true; what I'm telling you is what He personally told me. You now have two witnesses saying the same thing."

27. They still didn't understand that Jesus was talking about His heavenly Father and not His earthly father.

28. Then Jesus said, "After you've succeeded in having the Son of God arrested and shamed by crucifixion, then you'll realize that I was the One sent by God and that I did nothing on my own, but only those things which my Father asked me to do."

29. And the One who sent me is with me. When I came here, my Father didn't leave me. And I always do what He asks me to do because I love Him and want to please Him."

30. Now some who were listening to what Jesus was saying believed in Him.

31. Then Jesus turned to the crowd and spoke to those people, "If you continue to believe in me and in what I'm saying, then you are my disciples."

32. Soon you will hear even more truth about me, and this is the truth that will make you a free people."

33. Others in the crowd said, "We are a free people. We are the descendants of

Abraham, and our spirit has never been enslaved by any man. So what do you mean when you say, 'The truth will set you free?'"

34. Jesus answered, "I'm talking about being free from the slavery of sin, because anyone who sins is enslaved.

35. Now even if a slave is given a certain amount of freedom to carry out his duties, he's not really free. It's only the children of the master who are really free because they are under no one's control and can go and come as they please.

36. And I'm the Father's Son, so if I set you free from the control of sin, then you are really free.

37. I know that we are all the blood descendants of Abraham, but we're not speaking the same language. Some of you are plotting my death, which shows that you're not really free no matter what your heritage, because you're still controlled by hatred.

38. I'm telling you what I know and what I saw when I was with my Father. Yet you think you know what is right, but you're wrong. You're being inspired by a father other than Abraham, because Abraham listened to God, and you don't."

39. Then some of them said, "Abraham is the only father we have. We have no other father." Jesus said, "If you truly were the descendants of Abraham, you would act like Abraham.

40. You're plotting to kill someone who is talking to you about spiritual truths which He received directly from God. This isn't what Abraham would do to me.

41. Your attitude and spirit don't come from Abraham, but from another kind of father." They said, "You don't even know who your earthly father is. How then can you claim to know who your Spiritual Father is? But we know who our Spiritual Father is. He is God, and He is one."

42. Jesus responded, "If God were your Spiritual Father, you would respect and honor me because I came from being with God. I didn't come on my own, but we agreed, and He sent me.

43. Why don't you understand what I'm trying to tell you? Could it be that you really don't want to understand?

44. Your attitude and spirit is coming from the devil. He has had murder in his heart from the beginning, when he first became jealous of me, and you've had murder in your heart ever since you've known me. He indulged his pride and turned against me, and now there's no truthfulness left in him. When he tells you something, it's of his own making, because he can no longer tell the difference between truth and error. So he's the father of every lie and of everything evil.

45. Why do you hate me? Because I tell you the truth?

46. Can you prove that I'm a sinner because I've lied? If not, then why don't you believe that I'm telling you the truth about me?

47. If God is truly your Father, like He is mine, then you should be in tune with what God is trying to tell you. The reason you can't understand what I'm saying is that you haven't really accepted God as your Father."

48. Then the Jews said, "What you just said about us confirms what we've been telling the people about you, that you're a deceiver and as crafty as a Samaritan. It seems to us that you're the one who's being influenced by the devil."

49. Jesus answered, "I'm not being influenced by the devil. I'm trying to honor and represent my Father, but you don't even give me the respect and honor that you give to a stranger.

50. I'm not seeking respect and honor for myself, but there is Someone else who is very much concerned about how you receive me, and He'll decide if what you're doing is right or wrong.

51. I want to tell you that whoever believes what I'm saying and obeys my teaching, he will never die."

52. Then those who hated Jesus spoke up, "We've known for some time that you have a demon in you, and now we can definitely see that you're controlled by one. Abraham died, didn't he? And so did the prophets. How then can you say that whoever believes what you say, he will never die?

53. Are you greater than Abraham or the prophets? None of them could give

life to themselves, much less to anyone else. So who do you think you are?"

54. Jesus answered, "If I would make claims for myself that are not true, then my claims would be lies, but it is my Father who has allowed me to make these claims and to use my power to give people life. He is the same God you acknowledge as being the living God, the God of Israel, the One who gives life.

55. Yet you don't really know Him. But I know Him. If I would say I don't know Him, I would be lying and I would show that I have the same spirit you have and that I'm being influenced by the same source you are. But I know Him and I do what He asks me to do.

56. Also, I know that Abraham looked forward to the day when I would come; when he had a vision of the future and saw my day, he was glad."

57. Then the Jews said, "You're not even fifty years old yet. How then can you say that you know that Abraham looked forward to your coming?"

58. Jesus said, "Because I existed before Abraham was born."

59. Then they went to get some stones with which to stone Him, but when they came back, they couldn't pick Him out of the crowd. Miraculously, Jesus was hidden from their view, so He walked right by them and left the Temple.

CHAPTER 9

1. As Jesus and His disciples were leaving Jerusalem to go north toward Galilee, they saw a man they knew had been born blind.

2. So they asked Jesus, "Master, was this man born blind because of his sins or the sins of his parents?"

3. Jesus said, "He was not born blind because of his sins or because of the sins of his parents. However, his condition will provide God with an opportunity to demonstrate His love and power.

4. This is what I was sent here for, so I must do God's work while I can, because soon my time will be up.

5. But while I'm in this world, I'm the Father's light in the world."

6. Then He asked the disciples to bring

the blind man to Him. When the man came, Jesus squatted down, used a little spittle to make a tiny bit of clay, and then stood up and put the clay on the closed eyelids of the blind man.

7. As He did this, He said, "Now go to the nearby pool of Siloam and wash the clay off your eyes." The blind man did as he was told, and when he opened his eyes, he could see. Then he ran home praising God because he was healed.

8. His friends and neighbors said, "Look, isn't this the man who was born blind? Isn't he the one who always sat and begged?"

9. Other neighbors said, "Yes, he's the one!" But still others said, "No, he's not the one. He just looks like him." Then he spoke up, "Yes, I'm the one!"

10. So they asked him, "What happened? How is it that you can suddenly see?"

11. He said, "A man called Jesus came by, made a tiny bit of clay, put it on my eyes, and then told me to go to the pool of Siloam to wash it off. And when I did, I could see!"

12. They asked, "Who is this man? Where did He go?" The blind man said, "I don't know."

13. So they took him to the Pharisees,

14. because he was healed on the Sabbath and Jesus had made clay to do it.

15. Then the Pharisees asked him the same questions his friends and neighbors had: how he was healed and who did it. The man told them, "He put clay on my eyes, and, when I washed it off, I could see."

16. The Pharisees said, "Whoever did this is not from God because He did it on the Sabbath. So He broke God's law." Then some of the people said, "If He broke the Sabbath and sinned, how could He do what He did?" Before long, the people were divided.

17. The Pharisees then asked him, "What else can you tell us about the man who healed you?" He answered, "I really believe He's a prophet."

18. But the Jews were not willing to believe that the man was miraculously healed, so they decided to call in his par-

ents to see what they had to say.

19. When the man's parents came, the Pharisees asked them, "Is this your son? Was he born blind? And if so, what happened to him that he can suddenly see?"

20. The parents said, "Yes, this is our son and he was born blind.

21. Why it is that he can suddenly see, we don't know. He's old enough to speak for himself. Ask him."

22. The man's parents answered this way because they were afraid of the Pharisees who had publicly announced that anyone who believed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out from the synagogue.

23. (That's why they told the Pharisees to ask their son how it happened because he was of age and could speak for himself.)

24. Then the Pharisees turned to the man and said, "Now tell us again what happened, and give God the glory, not the man who healed you, because we know that He's a sinner."

25. The man answered and said, "Whether this Man's a sinner or not, I can't say. But one thing I know: once I was blind and now I can see!"

26. Again the Pharisees asked him, "Tell us once more, what actually did happen to make you see?"

27. The man answered and said, "I've already told you. Are you interested in being His disciples? Is that why you want to hear it again?"

28. They glared at him and said, "You may be His disciple, but we are not. We're Moses' disciples.

29. We know that God worked through him, but of this fellow we know little. We don't even know who His father was."

30. The man responded by saying, "Now that's really something. You say that you don't know anything about this Man and have no evidence that God is working through Him, yet you have living evidence standing right in front of you that He has power to open the eyes of people born blind.

31. And we know that only God, or those to whom He gives power to heal, can do something like this. He never gives

that kind of power to sinners.

32. Never in all of our history has there been a reported case of an ordinary person healing someone who was born blind.

33. If the Man who healed me hadn't been given special power by God, He couldn't have healed me just because He wanted to. That shouldn't be hard to understand."

34. The Pharisees turned on him and said, "Remember, you're a sinner yourself. You were born in sin because you were born blind. And you're trying to teach us?" Then they told him to get out.

35. Now when the news about all of this reached Jesus, He went looking for the man; and when He found him, He stopped him and said, "Would you like to meet the Son of God and be His disciple?"

36. The man said, "Yes, of course! Where is he? I want to see Him and meet Him."

37. Then Jesus said, "You're looking at Him and talking with Him."

38. The man said, "Lord, you sound like the One who healed me! Yes, I believe! You are the Son of God!" And he fell on his knees and worshiped Jesus.

39. Then Jesus said, "My presence in this world makes people decide either for me or against me. What happens is that those who don't seem to understand suddenly see and those who say they could understand are blind."

40. Some of the Pharisees standing nearby heard this and said, "Are you saying that we're blind?"

41. Jesus answered and said, "If you were blind and couldn't see what I'm saying, you wouldn't be guilty. But when you claim to see and understand and still refuse to acknowledge the truth about me, then it's your own attitude that's causing you to sin and be guilty."

CHAPTER 10

1. "Now I want to remind you of what you already know. If a man goes into the sheep pen a different way from the shepherd, everyone knows that he's a sheep stealer.

2. But the man who goes into the sheep pen the right way is the shepherd.

3. And if there's a night watchman at the sheep gate, he will let the shepherd in and the sheep will recognize the shepherd's voice as he calls each of them by name and then leads them out to pasture.

4. As they go out to pasture, the shepherd goes ahead of them, and they follow him because they know him.

5. They won't follow a stranger; they'll run from him because they recognize that he's a stranger and not the shepherd."

6. When Jesus finished, the Pharisees still didn't understand what He was talking about.

7. Then in plain words He said, "I am the door into God's sheep pen.

8. Those who preceded me claiming to be the Messiah were nothing but spiritual thieves and robbers, and God's real sheep didn't respond to them.

9. I am not only the door into God's sheep pen but also the way there. If anyone comes to me, he'll be safe and will find plenty of pasture from which to eat and will grow spiritually, to be more like God.

10. Thieves, on the other hand, are not interested in feeding the sheep, but rather, in feeding on them. They want to steal them and then kill them. I'm interested in the life of the sheep and in seeing that they live a more abundant life than they did before.

11. Also, I am the Good Shepherd, and as such, I'm ready to give my life for the sheep.

12. But those who are interested only in themselves have no real interest in the sheep. As soon as they see the wolves coming and realize that their own safety is at stake, they leave the sheep and let the wolves come in and tear the sheep apart.

13. The reason these false shepherds run away when danger comes is that they are interested in themselves and not in the sheep.

14. But I am the Real Shepherd and know my sheep, and they know me.

15. The Father knows that I'm ready to give my life for my sheep.

16. Also, there are other sheep that are not in Judea, and I have to bring them into God's sheep pen too. They will recognize my voice, and eventually there will be one

fold under one shepherd.

17. This is why my Father loves me, because I'm willing to die for all His sheep. After I die, I'll live again to guide them all.

18. Those wanting to kill me can't do so unless I let them. I have power to stop them from killing me and power to decide when to let them kill me. After I let them kill me, I have power to resurrect myself. All this is done with the Father's permission and under His direction."

19. Jesus, making these claims about Himself, divided the people and the leaders as He did before.

20. Some of them said, "He's possessed by the devil! He's mad!

Why even listen to a fellow like that?"

21. Others said, "He doesn't talk like someone who's devil possessed. How can someone who's devil possessed heal someone born blind?"

22. **Now** the next confrontation with the Jewish leaders occurred at the Feast of Dedication held in Jerusalem in the winter.

23. As Jesus walked under the colonnade called Solomon's Porch, which was attached to the Temple,

24. the Jewish leaders surrounded Him and said, "How much longer are you going to keep us in suspense? If you're the Messiah, tell us."

25. Jesus answered, "I've already told you, but you don't believe me. The works that I do in my Father's name confirm that what I've told you is true.

26. But you still don't believe me because you're not my sheep and you don't recognize my voice.

27. My sheep recognize my voice, and I recognize them, and they follow me without hesitation.

28. I'm the One who will give them eternal life, and they will never die, nor will anyone be able to take them away from me.

29. My Father loves them, too, and He's greater than I am; and nobody can take them away from Him.

30. You see, my Father and I are like one."

31. Then the Jewish leaders left Solomon's Porch and went searching for stones

to kill Him, just as they had done before.

32. When they came back, Jesus faced them and said, "I have done nothing but good to people, and I did all this under the directions of my Father. And you're going to stone me for doing good works?"

33. They said, "We're not going to stone you because of the good you've done, but for blasphemy. You're only a human being, yet you keep calling yourself the Son of God."

34. Jesus said, "Doesn't the Scripture say that God calls His children His sons?"

35. Now if the Scriptures say that God calls His children His sons, and the Scripture speaks nothing but truth,

36. how, then, can you accuse me of blasphemy? As I've told you, my Father has sent me to carry out His mission and I am His Son.

37. If you think I'm not doing Godlike works, then you don't have to believe who I am.

38. But if I am doing Godlike works, even though you don't want to accept me personally, at least acknowledge that these works are from God and that through them He's trying to tell you something. If you admitted that much, you would soon see that He's working through me and that He and I work together as one."

39. Nevertheless, what Jesus said did no good; they still hated Him. When He finished, they rushed at Him to grab Him and then drag Him to a place away from the Temple where they could stone Him. But He miraculously slipped out of their grasp and went on into the Temple.

40. Inside, He mingled with the crowd and later that day left town followed by a large number of people. From Jerusalem, He made His way to a place near the Jordan River where John the Baptist first preached and baptized. Here He stayed to get some rest.

41. Crowds of people followed Him, and they said among themselves, "John never worked any miracles himself; but everything He told us that this Man would do for us, He has done."

42. Many of these people who followed Him believed that Jesus was the Messiah.

CHAPTER 11

1. Now about this time in Jesus' ministry, Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha and a close friend of Jesus, was quite sick.

2. His sister Mary was the one caught committing adultery and the one whom the Pharisees wanted to stone and whom Jesus forgave. She was the same one who later anointed Jesus' feet with that expensive perfume and then wiped His feet with her hair.

3. So, when Lazarus was sick, the sisters sent the following message to Jesus who was up in Galilee: "Lord, the one whom you care about so much is very sick."

4. When Jesus read the note, He said to the messenger, "Tell the sisters not to worry; Lazarus won't die. Actually, his sickness will glorify both God and His Son."

5. Now Jesus loved these two sisters and their brother very much.

6. It hurt Him to see them suffering so; yet He stayed where He was for two more days.

7. On the third day He said to His disciples, "Let's go back down to Judea."

8. His disciples said, "Master, you were down there just recently, and the Jews wanted to stone you. And you want to go back there again?"

9. Jesus said, "There are about twelve hours of daylight in a day, and that's when a man needs to do what he wants to get done. And it's the same in my ministry. I don't have much time left. So while I can, I need to do my work and hope that people will see the light and recognize who I am.

10. I must do my work now, for soon I won't be able to do it, and people won't have the same light as they have now."

11. After His disciples tried and saw that they couldn't change His mind, He said to them, "Let's go. Our friend Lazarus is having a sound sleep, and I want to wake him up."

12. Then the disciples said, "Lord, if he's having a sound sleep, he's getting better, so we don't have to go."

13. But Jesus was talking about His death, while they thought He was talking

about sleeping.

14. When Jesus saw that they misunderstood what He had said, He told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead.

15. And for the sake of your faith, I'm glad I wasn't there. You'll see what I mean. So let's go."

16. Then Thomas, the twin, said to the rest of the disciples, "Come, let's go. If the Jews are going to kill Him, then let's die with Him."

17. So they left Galilee and headed south toward Judea. By the time they got there, Lazarus had been dead for nearly four days.

18. Now the village of Bethany where the sisters lived was only about two miles from Jerusalem.

19. Some of the prominent Jewish leaders from the city went out there to comfort them.

20. In addition to the relatives and friends, the sisters had hired professional mourners to come in to go through the customary ritual. While this was going on, someone quietly told Martha that Jesus was coming and that He was just outside the village. She slipped out of the house and went to meet Him. But Mary didn't know what was going on and stayed in the house crying.

21. Martha came up to Jesus and said, "Lord, if you had only been here, my brother wouldn't have died.

22. I say this because I know that whatever you ask God to do, He does it."

23. Jesus said, "Don't worry, Martha, your brother will soon be resurrected."

24. Martha said, "Oh, I know that. He'll be resurrected with all the other good people in the last days."

25. Jesus looked at her and said, "I have power to give life to anyone who believes in me, even though he's already dead. I am the Resurrection.

26. Anyone who dies believing in me will not die forever. Do you believe this?"

27. Martha answered and said, "Yes, Lord, I believe anything you say because you are the Messiah. You are the Son of the living God whom we all looked forward to."

28. Then she turned around and ran

back home to get Mary. She slipped into the house and whispered to her, saying, "The Master is here and wants to see you."

29. Quickly but quietly, Mary left the house with Martha to go and see Jesus.

30. Now Jesus had stayed on the outskirts of town waiting for Mary to come.

31. Meanwhile, the mourners and those who had stopped by to comfort the sisters, when they saw them both leave, said to one another, "They're probably going to the gravesite to mourn. Let's go, too."

32. But the sisters had gone to see Jesus, and when Mary saw Him, she fell on her knees and said, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died."

33. When Jesus saw her on her knees crying and then looked around and saw all the others around Him crying, He groaned aloud.

34. Sighing, He asked, "Where is he buried?" They said, "Come and we'll show you."

35. On the way there, He too cried.

36. Some of the people said, "Look, He's crying. He really must have loved Lazarus."

37. Others said, "If He loved him so, then why wasn't He here to heal him? He's the One who healed the man born blind. Certainly He could have healed Lazarus if He had really wanted to."

38. When they reached the small cave where Lazarus was buried, they found that the opening had already been closed by a huge stone.

39. Again Jesus was moved to tears. Then He said to some of the men, "Roll away the stone." But Martha spoke up, "Lord, don't go in and look at Lazarus. His body has already started to decay and it will smell bad. He's been dead for four days. Please don't go in."

40. Jesus replied, "Didn't I tell you that, if you would have faith in me, you would see a display of God's power?"

41. So the men rolled away the stone from the mouth of the cave as He asked them to. And Jesus looked up to heaven and said in a voice that was loud enough for everyone to hear, "Father, thank you for hearing me and letting me carry out

your wish.

42. I know you always hear me, but I'm saying this for the sake of the people here, so that they will know that you are the One who is doing this and that I am your Son. That's why I'm praying out loud and saying, thank you for hearing me."

43. Then He focused His eyes on the entrance to the cave and called out with a commanding voice, "Lazarus! Come out!"

44. For a moment it was deathly still. Then all at once Lazarus appeared at the entrance of the cave, wrapped in his burial cloth. Jesus quietly said to the men who had rolled away the stone, "Go and unwrap him."

45. Many who were there at the gravesite, including the Jews from Jerusalem, believed then and there that Jesus was the Messiah.

46. Some of the others immediately rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the Pharisees what had happened and how their authority would soon be threatened.

47. So the Pharisees and the chief priests called a council meeting and said to those present, "What are we going to do now? This man Jesus is performing some unheard-of miracles.

48. If we leave Him alone, soon everyone will be following Him. The Romans will see this as a potential insurrection. This could give them the excuse that they've been looking for: to dissolve our share in government and completely take charge of the country."

49. And Caiaphas, the officiating High Priest at the time, spoke to the council, "You're so scared that you're missing a simple solution to the whole problem.

50. Isn't it better for one man to die than for us to lose our whole nation to the Romans?"

51. Now what he said was more than a personal opinion. He actually voiced the predictions of Scripture which said that the Messiah would have to die to save the nation.

52. Not only would He die to save the Jews, but to save God's people, whoever they are.

53. After that, following the suggestion

of Caiaphas, the Jewish leaders put forth an organized effort to catch Jesus and to have Him executed.

54. So Jesus made no further public appearances in Jerusalem or anywhere else in Judea, and with His disciples went to a village called Ephraim on the edge of the Judean desert.

55. Now the Jewish Passover was soon to be celebrated, and many people from all over the country started making their way toward Jerusalem. Many of them wanted to get there early to ceremonially purify themselves before the religious festival began.

56. When they came to Jerusalem, many of them went to the Temple looking for Jesus. They asked one another, "Do you think He'll dare to come to the festival?"

57. They asked this because the chief priests and the Pharisees had passed the word around that, if anyone saw Jesus or knew where He was, he was to let them know, so they could arrest Him.

CHAPTER 12

1. Now six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived in Bethany, which was not far from Jerusalem. He went there to see His friend Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead, and his two sisters.

2. They all were glad to see Jesus again. While He was in town, Simon, the Pharisee whom Jesus had healed of leprosy, invited Him and His disciples to his house for dinner. Lazarus was to be the honored guest sitting next to Jesus, and Martha was invited to help with the preparations.

3. All that day Mary thought of the danger Jesus was in and that He might soon be killed; she had also heard that He might be crowned king. So she decided to do something special for Him. She took all of her savings and went to buy a bottle of the most costly perfume she could find. Then she slipped into the house, on into the guest room, and up to the dinner table where all were reclining on couches, eating. She made her way over to where Jesus was, knelt down at the end of the little couch, and opened her bottle of perfume. In a moment the whole house was filled with its fragrance and everyone

looked over to Jesus. With a heart full of gratitude, Mary reached up and poured a few drops on Jesus' head and then some on His feet. She was crying, and some of her tears fell on His feet, so she wiped them off with her own long hair.

4. Then Judas Iscariot, the disciple who in a few days, in exchange for money, would tell the chief priests and Pharisees where to find Jesus, broke the silence around the dinner table by saying,

5. "This is a very expensive perfume that Mary is using. It must have cost close to a year's salary, thousands of dollars. What a waste of money. We could have sold the perfume and given the money to the poor for food."

6. Now he said this, not because he wanted to help the poor, but rather because he was the treasurer of the group and had been taking money out of the bag for his own use.

7. Jesus spoke up and, not wanting to embarrass Judas, quietly said, "Judas, don't bother the lady. She saved her money to buy this perfume so that she could anoint my body before my execution and burial.

8. You will have plenty of opportunities to feed the poor, but I'm here only once. After what I've been through with the Pharisees, and now being listed as the most wanted man in the country, it's refreshing to be appreciated."

9. Now many of the people had heard that Simon had invited Jesus and Lazarus to his house for dinner. So they came, hoping to get a glimpse of both of them, but especially of Lazarus. They wanted to see the man who had been dead and who was now sitting next to Jesus, eating, laughing, and enjoying himself.

10. In the meanwhile, the chief priests and the Pharisees were laying plans to kill not only Jesus, but also Lazarus.

11. It was because of Lazarus that so many people were now accepting Jesus as the Messiah.

12. The day after the dinner at Simon's house, the word spread in Jerusalem that Jesus was coming to the city to attend the feast.

13. When the people heard this, many of them left the city and headed toward

Bethany to meet Jesus and welcome Him as their King. On the way, they tore off branches from palm trees; and when they met Him they shouted, "Blessings on the King of Israel. Blessings on the One sent by God."

14. Jesus responded to their welcome by climbing on the back of a young donkey that the disciples had brought to Him. This was to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah, which said,

15. "Rejoice, oh, Jerusalem, your King is coming riding on the back of a young donkey."

16. The disciples didn't fully understand the significance of what they were doing, but after Jesus ascended to heaven, they remembered that His royal ride into Jerusalem and His death later that week were all according to prophecy.

17. Now the people welcoming Jesus that morning on the road from Bethany to Jerusalem included those who had heard Him call Lazarus out of the tomb, raising him from the dead.

18. When the people in Jerusalem heard that Jesus and Lazarus were both coming, they almost emptied the city going out to meet them to see the man who was once dead.

19. The Pharisees said to one another, "Our word to the people that Jesus is destroying our nation means absolutely nothing to them. The whole world seems to be going after Him."

20. **Other** people were in Jerusalem for the Passover feast beside the Jews. Men from Greece had also come to worship the true God.

21. When Jesus dismounted the donkey, He went into the Temple to teach. Some of these Greeks came up to Philip, whom they recognized to be a Galilean, and said, "Sir, we would like to meet Jesus."

22. Philip went over to Andrew and asked him what to do. They both decided to ask Jesus if He wanted to see these men from Greece or if they should be asked to go away.

23. Jesus had overheard their conversation as they had talked with Philip standing on the threshold that led to the inner

courtyard that was reserved only for Jews. Gladly Jesus went into the Gentile courtyard to talk with them. When He finished visiting with them, He said to His disciples, "The hour has now come for my mission to close. My sacrifice will be honored around the world."

24. You see, my mission is not over until I die. It's like a kernel of wheat; unless it's buried and dies, it produces nothing. It will always be just one kernel. But if it dies, it produces a whole harvest of kernels.

25. This is true in everyone's life. If a person lives only for himself, he'll lose the very quality of life that he's working so hard to achieve. But if he hates the selfishness that's in this world and lives for others, he'll produce a great harvest of good things for God and receive eternal life.

26. If anyone wants to have a taste of eternal life now, let him come and imitate me. Then wherever I am, he'll be able to follow because he imitates me even as I imitate my Father. My Father honors all those who live for others as I do.

27. But right now I can just feel what's coming. What can I say? Should I ask my Father to relieve me of this responsibility? I can't do that without denying Him because that's the very reason I came, to carry out my Father's will."

28. Then Jesus prayed, "Father, please honor your name in front of these people. Amen." A voice from heaven spoke, "I have brought honor and glory to my name before, and I will do so again."

29. Now the people standing nearby heard something, but didn't understand what it was. Some said, "That sounded like thunder." Others said, "It sounded like an angel just spoke to Him."

30. Jesus spoke up, "The voice you just heard was for your sake, not mine."

31. This world's freedom is about to come and its wicked ruler will no longer be allowed to represent this planet before the council of the universe. Soon his actions against me will let the universe see the kind of person he is and what sin has done to him.

32. When I'm lifted up, my death will be the means of drawing all kinds of people

to God."

33. By saying this, He let everyone there know that He would soon be crucified.

34. Then the people asked Him, "Now, from the Scriptures we understand that when the Messiah comes, He will be with us forever. How then can you say that the Son of Man will be crucified? Isn't the Son of Man another name for the Messiah?"

35. Jesus answered, "The Light of this world is with you just a few days longer. Listen and follow that Light while it's here, otherwise you'll be trying to grope your way to heaven in spiritual darkness, not knowing where you're going."

36. While you have the Light with you, have faith in that Light and you'll become the children of Light." Then Jesus and His disciples mingled with the Temple worshipers and were lost in the crowd.

37. Even though He had done many miracles in front of the Jewish leaders and the people, many still did not believe that He was the Messiah.

38. This, too, was according to a prophecy of Isaiah, who said, "Who has believed the Lord's report? And who has responded to God's revelation?"

39. It wouldn't be right to expect everyone to respond because Isaiah said also,

40. "God has not interfered with their choice of not wanting to see and understand. Nor has He interfered with their decision to steel themselves against the truth and oppose it. As a result, they will not be able to see, and they will not be able to understand, nor be converted and healed."

41. Isaiah made these prophecies after he had seen the Messiah's mission in vision.

42. Quite a number of priests in leadership positions, however, did accept Jesus as the Messiah. But because they were afraid of the chief priests and the Pharisees, they did not step out publicly and declare their allegiance; otherwise they would have been put out of the synagogue.

43. Besides being afraid, they loved to be praised by their superiors and honored by the people whom they served instead of being honored by God.

44. From one end of the Temple, Jesus

suddenly spoke with a loud voice, "Those who believe that I'm the One who I claim to be are not only putting their confidence in me, but also in the One who sent me.

45. And those who see me also see the One who sent me.

46. I have come into the world to bring you spiritual light, and those who believe who I am will be safely guided by God through this world of spiritual darkness.

47. Now if anyone hears what I'm saying and still doesn't believe, I'll not condemn him because I didn't come into the world to condemn people, but to save them.

48. The person who rejects me and doesn't believe what I'm saying is condemning himself. What I've said about myself will stand as a record against him.

49. I'm not just trying to talk about myself, but the Father who sent me asked me to tell you all this about myself.

50. What I'm really doing is offering you eternal life. That's why I'm sharing with you what the Father has told me to tell you."

CHAPTER 13

1. Now when the evening had come that began the festival of the Passover, and it was time to eat the Passover meal, Jesus knew that His time to leave this world had also come. Having loved His own people all the years He was here, He loved them to the very end, regardless of how they treated Him.

2. When He and His disciples had finished eating the Passover meal, Judas was ready to carry out his devilish plan to tell the authorities where they could find Jesus. He had already agreed on the price, which was thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave.

3. But Jesus knew that the Father had agreed for Him to come, that He was truly God's Son, and that He would be crucified.

4. Now, before the meal, He left the table, removed His outer robe, took a towel, and tucked it in at His waist, ready to wash His disciples' feet.

5. And that is exactly what He did. He poured some water into a basin and

washed each man's feet and dried them with the towel that was around His waist.

6. When He came to Peter, Peter said, "Lord, you're the Son of God! You're not lowering yourself to wash my feet!"

7. Jesus looked at him and said, "You don't understand now why I'm doing this, but you will after I'm gone."

8. Peter said, "I don't care. I'm not letting my God wash my feet!" Then Jesus said, "If you won't let me wash your feet, then you've got too much pride to be my disciple."

9. Peter's response was, "Oh, Lord, if that's the case, then don't stop with my feet, but wash me all over!"

10. Jesus said, "When a person has had his bath and has walked down the road in sandals and then comes back inside, he has only to rinse the dust off his feet. He doesn't have to take his bath all over again. If a man has been bathed spiritually, he doesn't have to be baptized all over again each time he makes a sinful mistake. And all of you have been bathed spiritually, except one."

11. Jesus said this because He knew which one of His disciples would betray Him.

12. So after He washed all the disciples' feet, He put His robe back on, sat down at the table, and said, "Now let me explain the meaning of all this and tell you why I washed your feet.

13. You call me Lord, and that's right, because I am your Lord.

14. However, if I'm willing to do anything for you, even what you consider a menial task like washing someone's dirty feet, you should be willing to do the same for one another no matter how hard it is for you.

15. I've given you an example of what I mean when I say that I love you and care about you. And that's how much I want you to love and care about each other.

16. You see, a disciple should not feel that he's above doing what his Master does; nor is he who is sent on a mission greater than the one who sends him.

17. Now if you understand what I'm saying and take on an attitude of service, you'll be happy not only with yourself,

but also with one another.

18. I know that all of you have a deep willingness to change. That's why I chose you. But one of you I did not choose, and yet the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which says, 'The one who ate with me has sold me to the authorities.'

19. I'm telling you this not to scold you for forcing this person on me as my disciple, but just to point out to you that all this is according to Scripture, so, when it's all over, you'll have another evidence that I'm the Messiah.

20. Also, I want to say that whoever accepts from you the truth about me is not so much responding to you as he is to me. Those who respond in spirit to me will accept you."

21. Suddenly Jesus seemed to be really troubled and said, "Let me tell you plainly that before this evening is over, one of you will sell me to the Jewish authorities and then tell them where to find me."

22. The disciples looked at each other, wondering which one of them He was talking about.

23. Then Peter whispered to the disciple who was sitting next to Jesus, and who seemed to have the closest relationship with Him,

24. to quietly ask Jesus which one of the disciples He was talking about.

25. So this disciple leaned over to Jesus and whispered, "Lord, which one of us are you talking about?"

26. Jesus whispered back, "The one to whom I will give the next piece of bread after I dip it in the sauce." Then Jesus dipped a piece of bread in the sauce and offered Judas a taste.

27. Judas took it, and after he had eaten it, suddenly became very restless just as if another spirit had taken control. Jesus looked at him and said, "You're excused. Whatever you feel you need to do, go ahead and do."

28. None of the other disciples knew why Jesus told Judas to go.

29. They thought that Jesus had made arrangements with him to go and buy whatever was needed for the rest of the week to celebrate the Passover and to give an offering to the poor. Judas would be

the logical one to do this because he handled all the money.

30. After Judas ate the bread that Jesus had given him and was excused from the rest of the meal, he immediately got up and walked out into the dark, because it was already night.

31. Then Jesus said to the rest of the disciples, "The time has now come for me to vindicate my Father's name and to show myself to be the Messiah.

32. If God wants me to glorify Him by my death, then I know He will glorify me.

33. When I look at you, I feel as though I'm saying goodbye to members of my own family, because soon I'll be dead. You'll miss me. What I told the Jews, 'Where I'm going, you can't come,' applies to you, too.

34. Before I go, I want you to see God's law in the light of love. Genuine love means to love one another the same way I have loved you. When you do that, you'll be keeping the law.

35. And people will know that you are my disciples by how much you love each other."

36. Then Peter interrupted Jesus. "Lord, we know about this love, but what we're concerned about is where you're planning to go." Jesus said, "Don't even let that trouble you, because where I'm going, you can't possibly follow, but eventually you will."

37. Peter answered, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I'll go anywhere and do anything for you. I'll even die for you!"

38. Jesus looked at Peter and said, "You say you'll be willing to die for me? I want to tell you that before the night is over and the roosters crow in the morning, you will have denied even knowing me."

CHAPTER 14

1. "Don't let your hearts be troubled. You can have just as much confidence in what I say as in what God says.

2. I want to tell you that in my Father's house there's plenty of room for all of you. If it weren't so, I would have told you. So I'm going home to prepare a place for you.

3. Now if I go back home to prepare a place for you, you can be sure that I'll

come back to take you home, and then you'll be with me forever.

4. And you know where I'm going and also how to get there."

5. Then Thomas spoke up, "Lord, we have to be honest with you. We don't really know where you're going and how to get there."

6. Jesus answered, "I'm the Way you get to the Father. I'm the Living Truth about what He's like. I'm the Source of eternal life. No one can come to the Father on his own; he has to come through me.

7. If you have known me, then you've known the Father, because you've known and seen Him through me."

8. Then Philip spoke up, "But, Lord, just give us one glimpse of the Father before you go, and we'll be satisfied."

9. Jesus, being somewhat disappointed with Philip's lack of faith, looked at him and said, "You mean I've been with you all this time, Philip, and you still don't know me well enough to see the Father in me? When you're looking at me, you're looking at the Father. How then can you ask me to give you a glimpse of the Father?"

10. You must believe me when I tell you that I am the Father in action and that the Father is living out His life through me. All the things I've taught you were not just my own ideas, but the things the Father wanted me to share with you. It's the Father's mission that I'm carrying out, not my own.

11. Believe me when I tell you that I've done everything the Father would do if He were here. When I speak, it's the Father speaking through me. If it's hard for you to believe me when I tell you that I'm the Father in action, then don't base your faith on what I'm saying, but on the miracles that you've seen me do."

12. Then Jesus turned to the rest of the disciples and said, "If you really believe that I am who I say I am, you will be able to do the same miracles that I've done. In fact, you'll be able to do miracles in many more places than I have, because I'm going back home to the Father.

13. Now, whatever you ask me to do for you, I'll do it, if you ask for it in the

same spirit and for the same reason that I would. Then your actions will glorify the Father just as my actions have.

14. So ask for anything you need to accomplish your mission. I promise I'll do it for you.

15. If you really love me, you'll show it by doing what I ask you to do.

16. As soon as I get back home, I'll ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit to you to comfort your sorrow. He will be in charge of our mission down here and will stay with you all the while I'm gone.

17. The world in general won't listen to the Holy Spirit because it doesn't really know Him, but you know Him and you've already accepted Him. I know, because I've seen Him working in you. He's been motivating you and guiding you, and He will continue to do so.

18. So I'm not leaving you by yourselves. I'll be working side by side with you.

19. Now in just a few hours, I'll be leaving, and the world will wonder where I've gone. But you know where I'm going, and one day we'll be together again, because I'm not going to be dead forever; and, when you die, neither will you.

20. After I go back home to my Father and the Holy Spirit comes, you'll understand things even better than you do now. Then you'll really know what it means to be one with me because you'll have the same spirit as my Father and I do. And you'll be one with us.

21. The person who listens to what I say and does what I tell him is the one who really loves me and will know that my Father and I really love him. And I'll be able to reveal even more of this love to him."

22. Then Thaddaeus spoke up and said, "Lord, how is it that you can be by our side through the presence of the Spirit and we not see you?"

23. Jesus answered and said, "If someone loves me and decides to do what I ask him to, my Father and I both will be by his side to help him.

24. If someone doesn't love me and doesn't care to listen to what I have to say, he's not rejecting me, he's rejecting the

Father who's speaking through me.

25. I want to make these things clear to you while I'm still here.

26. The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send, will represent me; and He will help you to understand these things more fully after I'm gone.

27. I want you to have the same inner peace that I have. I'm not talking about the peace and security that the world gives but about the deep, peaceful relationship with the Father that only I can give. I don't want you to worry about your relationship with the Father, nor do I want you to be afraid of Him.

28. As I've already told you, I have to go away; but I'll return to be by your side. If you really love me, then be glad that I'm going back home to be with the Father, who is greater than I.

29. I'm sharing all these things with you ahead of time so that when they happen, your faith in me will be confirmed.

30. After tonight, I'll not be talking to you for awhile. In the meantime, the devil, who considers himself to be the prince of this world, will do all he can to foul my mission by trying to get me to sin, but he'll not find one inclination in me that will respond to his temptations.

31. The whole universe needs to know that I love the Father more than anything else. Everything the Father tells me to do, I do. Come, let's get ready to go."

CHAPTER 15

1. Jesus said, "But before we go I want to give you one more illustration that will help you to understand what I've been talking about. You see, I'm like a grapevine planted in my Father's vineyard, and He's the gardener.

2. And you are like little vine branches. Now, if there are some branches on the vine that do not bear fruit He will have to snip them off; and those branches that do bear fruit, He will have to keep trimming them, so they can bear more fruit.

3. Your personalities have been through one trimming process just by my being here and teaching you.

4. Now I'll remain in you if you remain in me. Just as the little branches

cannot bear fruit, unless they're connected with the vine, neither can you bear spiritual fruit, unless you're connected with me.

5. I am the True Vine and you are the true branches. If you remain in me and I remain in you, you will bear much spiritual fruit. But without me, you can't produce a thing.

6. If you detach yourself from me, your spirituality will shrivel up and die just as a branch will shrivel up when it's cut off from the vine. Then with the other dead branches, it will be put on the brush pile and burned.

7. The way to stay attached to me is to do what I tell you to do. Then you can ask for whatever you need to carry out the Father's mission, and He'll give it to you.

8. That's how the Father will be vindicated before the universe, by the kind of fruit that you produce. This is what it means to be a disciple.

9. To the same degree the Father loves and cares about me, I love and care about you. So don't detach yourself from me.

10. If you do what I ask you to do in the same spirit as I have done what my Father has asked me to do, you'll never lose your attachment to me.

11. I'm telling you these things so you can have as much enjoyment obeying the Father as I have had. Then you'll really know what genuine happiness is.

12. I'm asking you to love one another the same way I have loved you.

13. There is no greater way to show your love for a dying friend than to give your life for him, so he can live.

14. And you say that you are my friends. So you need to demonstrate that friendship by doing what I ask you to do.

15. I never treated you like servants, and I never will. Servants aren't told everything their masters are planning to do. But you're my friends. So ever since I've known you, I've told you everything my Father told me as you could understand it.

16. You didn't choose to be my friends, but I have been your friend even before you knew who I was. Also, I called you to go out and gather much fruit, the kind of

fruit that will stay loyal to me. I promise that whatever you ask the Father to give you to help carry out your mission, He'll give it to you.

17. With our common mission in mind, you can see why I keep telling you to love each other.

18. If the people of this world hate you for what you're doing, just remember that they hated me before they hated you.

19. You see, if you had the same spirit as the world does, people would love you. But because I'm asking you to be different from the world, the world will hate you.

20. Remember what I've just told you. Servants are not usually treated better than their masters; and since they have treated me this way, they won't treat you any better. But as you know, some of the people have been glad to hear what I had to say, and some of the people will be glad to hear what you have to say.

21. Those who will mistreat you won't do it so much because they hate you, but because of what you'll be telling them about me. The reason they will do it is because they don't know the One who sent me, or if they know Him, they don't have a living relationship with Him.

22. If I had not come and pointed out their sins, they would feel quite comfortable with me; but now they feel guilty because they can't cover up their sins anymore,

23. and their hatred for me extends to the Father also.

24. If I hadn't done anything differently among them from what their regular religious teachers do, they would still go on pretending to love God; but my actions have exposed their pretense, so they hate both me and my Father.

25. This fulfills just what is written in the Scriptures when it says, 'They will hate me without a cause.'

26. After I send the Holy Spirit to you--who also will come with the Father's consent--He will take charge and tell the truth about me just as my Father has, and, He will tell it to the world.

27. You will be His witnesses because you have seen me and been with me from the beginning of my ministry."

CHAPTER 16

1. "I'm telling you what will happen ahead of time, so you won't be surprised.

2. You'll be disfellowshipped from the synagogues, and the time will come when some will think that they are doing God a favor by killing you.

3. They will do this because they really don't know me or the Father. They don't understand that my Father and I are trying to get them into heaven not trying to keep them out.

4. I'm telling you these things so that when they happen to you, you won't be surprised. And you'll be glad that I warned you about this ahead of time. The reason I didn't tell you all this from the very beginning was that you weren't the real target of hatred; I was. And when they did attack you, I was there to protect you.

5. But now I have to go back to the One who sent me; yet not one of you said you were happy for me to go.

6. Is it because I've told you that you will be persecuted? Is that why you're so sad?

7. I'm telling you the truth. I must leave you, because if I don't, the Holy Spirit can't come in His fullness to take over. But I promise you that as soon as I leave, I'll make arrangements for Him to come.

8. When He comes, He'll go ahead of you, convicting people of their sins, urging them to turn away from sinning and do what's right, and warning them that they will be held accountable for what they do.

9. Their first sin is that they don't believe in me.

10. Their next sin is that they won't turn around and do what's right.

11. And their third major sin is that they can't accept the fact that they will be held accountable for what they do.

12. Now there are a lot of other things I could tell you, but you've heard enough and are not really ready for any more.

13. When the Holy Spirit comes, He'll begin teaching where I left off, and will share with you more and more truth. He won't be talking about Himself, but He'll say whatever the Father directs Him to say, which will include things still to come.

14. He'll talk about me because He is to carry on my mission, and He'll help you to understand it even better.

15. Everything the Father wanted me to do I have done, and that's why I said that the Holy Spirit must now come to continue my mission.

16. My time is really getting short now. Soon I'll have to leave you, but you'll see me again for a little while before I finally go home."

17. Then some of the disciples quietly asked each other, "What does He mean when He says, 'I'll have to leave you, but then in a little while I'll see you again, and then I'll go home'?"

18. What does this 'little while and I'll see you again' mean? We don't understand what He's talking about."

19. Jesus knew what was bothering them, so He said, "Do you want to know what I meant when I said, I'll see you again for a little while before I go home?"

20. Well, in just a few hours you'll be stunned by what you see happening, and you'll weep bitter tears over it while others will be delighted. Then suddenly your sorrow will turn into joy.

21. It's just like a woman who is expecting a child and is having labor pains. She knows that she has to go through all these pains to deliver her baby, because there's no other way for it to be born. But as soon as it's born, she forgets all about the pain she endured, because she's given birth to a new baby.

22. Soon you'll be hurting when you see what's happening, but we'll see each other again, and then you'll be happier than you've ever been before, and no one will be able to take that happiness away from you.

23. Then you'll understand what I've been trying to tell you, and all the questions you now have will be answered. And you'll feel free to go directly to the Father to ask Him for anything you need to share your joy with others, and He'll give it to you.

24. Up to now, you've never really asked the Father for anything, not even in my name. You need to learn that you can go to Him directly and ask Him for any-

thing you need to make your mission successful.

25. Now, I know that I'm still not answering your questions as plainly as I might, but soon I'll be able to talk to you again, and then I'll tell you more about my Father and myself.

26. After that, you'll feel more comfortable in going to the Father directly and asking Him for anything you need. And I'll be asking Him for things for you as well.

27. You see, the Father himself has always loved you. But He's especially happy because you've loved me, accepted me, and believed me when I told you that I was the Son of God.

28. I came to this world directly from the Father, and when I leave this world, I'll go straight back to Him."

29. Then His disciples said to Him, "Now you're making things plain, and we're beginning to understand.

30. We're convinced that you know more about the future than we thought you did. That's why you don't have to ask someone else what he thinks is going to happen. This is what convinces us that you have come directly from God."

31. Jesus said, "Are you sure you really believe everything I've told you?"

32. A few hours from now, you'll all leave me and go your way, and I'll be left to face the future alone. Yet, I won't really be alone because my Father will be with me.

33. Now I'm telling you this so you'll know that I still love you, even though I know you'll be leaving me. Soon you too will face rejection, but cheer up and remember that I faced it before you did and I overcame, so I know that you can do the same."

CHAPTER 17

1. **Then** Jesus looked up to heaven and prayed, "Father, the hour has now come for you to honor me as your Son, so that I may honor you as my Father.

2. You have put the whole human race under my care and allowed me to give eternal life to all whom you've been able to help to accept me.

3. And this is what it means to have eternal life: to know you as being the only true God and to accept me, Jesus Christ, as your Son.

4. I have honored you while I've lived here, and I've finished the work that you gave me to do.

5. Now make me feel part of you again in the same way I felt part of you before this world was ever created.

6. I've lived out your life for all to see and have told these men, whom you chose to be my disciples, all about you. They've been good disciples.

7. They now know that whatever authority and power I have or whatever I've said has come from you.

8. I've told them everything you told me to tell them. They've accepted it, and now know that I've come directly from you and that you sent me here.

9. I especially pray for them right now, not for the world. These are the men that you have chosen to be my disciples, so they are your disciples, too.

10. In fact, anyone who follows me actually belongs to you just as much as they belong to me. These are the ones who will give credibility both to my Sonship and to our mission.

11. In just a little while, I'll be leaving this world, but they'll be staying. Soon I'll be seeing you, but they'll be left alone. Dearest Father, please watch over these men whom you've given to me, so that they may honor you by being one just as you and I are one.

12. All the while I've been here, I've watched over them and kept them together for your sake. I haven't lost one of them, except Judas, who chose to sell me to the authorities, and it was predicted that he would do this.

13. So now I'm ready to come home to see you again. And I've told these men everything that would happen and that they'll soon experience the same joyous relationship that I've always had with you.

14. Also, I've sent them out two by two to spread the good news about you, so they've already experienced what it means to have people reject them. The people treated them as they did because these men

don't have the same spirit that the world does, just as I don't.

15. Now I'm not asking you to take them out of this world, but to keep them from the evil that is in this world so that they won't lose their hold on me and forget their mission.

16. They don't really belong here any more than I do.

17. Help them to be holy men, men who are committed to truth and saturated with your Word, because the truth is found in your Word.

18. I'm sending them into the world to tell others about you, just as you sent me into the world to tell the people about you.

19. And it was for their sake that I carried out this mission, and that I lived the way I did so that they could have a model to follow.

20. Now, I'm not just praying for these men, but for all those who will become my disciples because of what they hear these men saying.

21. That's why it's so important, Father, that they have the same spirit and be one, just as you and I are one. Then they'll be one with us, and the world will be able to see what my mission was all about and believe that you really sent me here.

22. The respect you've shown to me I've shown to them so that they can know what it's like to have mutual love and respect, as we have for each other.

23. I in them and you in me, so they may be as one, as we are one. That's how the world will know that you have sent me and that you will love them just as much as you loved me.

24. Father, I would like these men, whom you have chosen to be my disciples, to be with me. I want them to see my glory and the honor you will bestow on me and especially how much you love me.

25. Oh, my righteous Father, the world just doesn't know you as I do. But I know you and these men now know that you've sent me to show them what you're like.

26. I have told them about you, and the Holy Spirit will continue telling them about you, so that the same love I have for you and you have for me, will be in them. Amen."

CHAPTER 18

1. **When** Jesus had finished praying, He and His disciples left the upper room and made their way out of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley, to a little prayer garden on the side of the Mount of Olives.

2. Judas knew this place because Jesus often came here with His disciples to pray.

3. It wasn't long after Jesus had arrived there that Judas came leading a small group of Roman soldiers, some Temple guards sent by the chief priests, and the Pharisees looking for Jesus. They carried lanterns, torches, and swords, and were followed by a mob of ruffians.

4. Jesus, who had been praying, knew they were coming. He got up from His knees and went to meet them. He asked, "May I help you? For whom are you looking?"

5. They answered, "We're looking for Jesus, the One from Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I'm the One you're looking for." Judas was there with them to identify Jesus.

6. As soon as Jesus said, "I'm the One you're looking for," the whole group stepped backward and fell to the ground.

7. After they got back on their feet, Jesus asked them again, "Whom did you say you were looking for?" They said, "Jesus, the One from Nazareth."

8. Jesus answered and said, "I've told you that I'm the One. If you're looking for me; let these other men go."

9. This is exactly what He had said earlier about His disciples--that none of them would be harmed.

10. But when it dawned on Peter that these people had come to arrest Jesus, he pulled out his short sword, charged the group, and swung at the man closest to him. Fortunately, the man saw the blow coming and moved his head to one side, but Peter's sword still caught his ear and sliced it off.

11. Before the situation could erupt in a pitched battle, Jesus quickly took charge and commanded Peter to stop. He said to him, "Put away your sword. This is all part of my Father's will; I'm not here to fight, but to love and to save."

12. Then the captain in charge ordered his soldiers to arrest Jesus. They and some

of the Temple guards stepped forward, grabbed Him, tied His hands behind His back, and led Him away.

13. First they took Jesus to Annas, who was the retired High Priest and Caiaphas' father-in-law. Caiaphas was the official High Priest.

14. (He was the one who had told the ruling council that it was better for them to execute one man than to let things get out of hand and have the Romans take complete control of the nation.)

15. Now two of the disciples, Peter and John, followed the mob at a distance to the courtyard of the High Priest's residence, where Jesus was undergoing a preliminary trial conducted by Annas. The girl keeping the gate knew John, so she let him in, but left Peter standing outside.

16. When John turned around and saw Peter still standing outside, he went back and spoke to the girl about Peter, so she let him in, too.

17. A little later, as Peter was standing by the courtyard fire to warm himself, this same girl looked at him and said, "Aren't you one of Jesus' disciples?" Peter said, "I am not!"

18. Soon more of the Temple workers and guards pushed in around the fire because they were getting cold. Peter stayed there with them.

19. Meanwhile, inside the palace, Annas the retired High Priest questioned Jesus about His disciples and about His teachings.

20. Jesus answered, "Everything I taught, I taught openly, whether in the Temple, the synagogue, or in people's houses. No one was excluded. Anyone could come and hear what I had to say. There was nothing secret or sinister about my mission.

21. So if you want to know what I taught, all you have to do is ask my disciples. They'll tell you what I said. Or, you can ask anyone else who followed me; they'll know what I taught. There's really no need for me to tell you."

22. Then one of the Temple guards who stood close to Jesus slapped Him across the mouth and said, "Is that the way you

talk to the High Priest?"

23. Jesus answered, "If I said anything wrong, please tell me. Or, if I spoke disrespectfully, tell me how I should have said it. But don't slap me for nothing."

24. By this time, those council members who were against Jesus had been contacted and asked to come to the nation's courtroom for a secret trial. So Annas sent Jesus with His hands still tied, over to Caiaphas, who was ready to chair the council and try Jesus.

25. Outside in the courtyard, Peter was still standing by the fire warming himself. Again someone looked at him and asked, "Aren't you one of Jesus' disciples?" Once more Peter denied it and said, "I certainly am not!"

26. Then one of the servants of the High Priest who had come with the mob to arrest Jesus and who was related to the man that Peter had swung at, whose ear he had cut off, spoke up: "I'm sure I saw you with Jesus in the prayer garden earlier tonight when we went there to arrest Him."

27. For the third time, Peter denied knowing Jesus. As soon as he did, a nearby rooster crowed just as Jesus had predicted.

28. It was almost morning as Jesus was led out of the nation's courtroom, where Caiaphas had presided, and on over to the Roman hall of justice to get Pilate's consent for the execution. But the Jews stopped just outside the hall of justice because they didn't want to disqualify themselves from taking part in the rituals of the Passover.

29. Pilate came out to where they were and said, "What are you accusing this man of and what's so urgent about all this?"

30. They answered, "If we didn't think He was guilty, we wouldn't have brought Him to you."

31. Then Pilate said, "If you've already tried Him and found Him guilty, then carry out your sentence according to your own laws. Rome has permitted you to do this." The Jewish leaders responded, "That's true, but the law does not allow us to carry out the death sentence without the consent of the Roman governor."

32. This was the beginning of the battle between Pilate and the Jewish leaders as to whether Jesus should be executed or not.

Finally the Jewish leaders got their demands and Jesus was sentenced to be executed by crucifixion, which was just what He had predicted.

33. Then Pilate ordered Jesus to be taken inside so he could talk to Him privately. "Are you claiming to be the rightful King of the Jews as they say you are?"

34. Jesus answered, "Are you asking me because you really want to know or because you're just curious?"

35. Pilate asked, "Do I look like I'm a Jew? Why should I be interested in whether you're the rightful King or not? It's your own people and their priests who have brought you here for trial. You must have done something to deserve the death sentence. So tell me, what did you do?"

36. Jesus answered, "Yes, I'm the rightful King of the Jews and I've told them so, but my kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would fight to keep me from being arrested, but my kingdom is not a political kingdom, it's a spiritual one."

37. Then Pilate said, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You stated it correctly. I am a king and I have said so publicly. I was born a king and I came here to announce this truth to everyone who will listen. Those searching for truth will recognize that what I'm saying is true."

38. Pilate exploded with laughter and said, "Truth? What's that? All religious teachers claim to know what truth is." Then he went back outside and said to the Jews, "I can't find anything that this Man has done that would necessitate execution."

39. But I'll tell you what I'll do for you. You have a custom which Rome has agreed to that once a year at your Passover feast you may ask for a prisoner to be freed. Now whom do you want me to release this year? If you don't have anyone particular in mind, then why don't you let me release this man Jesus? That way there will be no perversion of justice on the part of anyone, and no one will lose face."

40. But the Jewish leaders said, "Absolutely not! We want Barabbas released, not Jesus!" Then the crowd started chanting for Barabbas, even though they knew he was a murderer and an insurrectionist.

CHAPTER 19

1. Then Pilate went back into the hall of justice to where Jesus was, determined to do what he could to free Him. He decided to have Him scourged to appeal to the Jewish leaders' sympathy.

2. So the Roman soldiers took Jesus into the courtyard below and decided to have some fun in the process. One of them got a thorn branch, twisted it around to make it look like a crown of laurels such as the Caesars wore, and forced it down on Jesus' head. Another brought an old purple robe and threw it over His shoulders.

3. They all saluted and shouted, "Hail to the King of the Jews!" Then each one stepped up and slapped Jesus across the mouth. When they finished having their fun, they scourged Him as Pilate had ordered until His back was laid open.

4. When Pilate called for Jesus, they brought Him back upstairs into the hall of justice. Then Pilate went out to talk to the Jewish leaders and said, "In a minute I want you to see what I've done to the Jesus man for you. Now what I want you to do is to reconsider and to let Him go instead of Barabbas."

5. Then he called for Jesus to be brought out with His crown of thorns and His purple robe. And Pilate said, "Look at this man! Look at His back! What more do you want?"

6. But when the chief priests and the Temple officers saw Jesus, they said to Pilate, "We want Him crucified!" Immediately the mob started shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" This really upset Pilate. He was angry because of their lack of sympathy for such an innocent man. Finally he said, "If you want this man crucified, then go ahead and crucify Him. I find this man innocent!"

7. Then the Jewish leaders said, "According to our law, He ought to die because He's continually claiming to be the Son of God."

8. When Pilate heard that, he was afraid.

9. So he took Jesus back into the judgment hall and said to Him, "Where did you originally come from?" Jesus just stood there and didn't answer.

10. Then Pilate said, "Are you just going to stand there? Aren't you going to answer me? Don't you know that I have the power to have you crucified or to let you go?"

11. Jesus answered, "Actually, you couldn't do a thing to me unless heaven allowed it. But those who brought me to you will have the greater guilt."

12. After this, Pilate tried his best to release Jesus, but each time he tried, the Jewish leaders reminded him that such an act would put him in opposition to Caesar because he would be letting someone go who claimed to be king. If Rome ever heard about it, that would be political suicide. And the shouting mob confirmed the severity of the situation.

13. Pilate, contemplating the fact that the Jews would not hesitate to accuse him of treason before the emperor, had Jesus brought back out of the judgment hall. Then Pilate ascended the steps to the marble platform where he took his seat as Roman judge.

14. By this time it was about six o'clock in the morning of the preparation day before the weekly Sabbath and the special Sabbath of the Passover. After Pilate took his seat, he looked out at the Jewish leaders and said, "This is your king! Just look at what I've done to Him for you!"

15. The mob shouted back, "Take Him away! Crucify Him!" Pilate called out again and said, "You mean you want me to crucify your king?" The people, led by the Jewish leaders, shouted louder than ever, "We have no king but Caesar! Caesar! Caesar! Caesar!"

16. Then Pilate pronounced the death penalty and turned Jesus over to the Roman soldiers for crucifixion.

17. They took Jesus to the courtyard below, where they placed on His shoulders the heavy crossbeam which He carried through the streets of Jerusalem to a place just outside the city, which was called Golgotha in Hebrew, meaning the place of the skull.

18. There they crucified Him together with two of Barabbas' men, placing one of them on Jesus' right and the other on His left.

19. Then over His head they nailed a sign that Pilate had ordered to be placed there, which said, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

20. This sign attracted people's attention and brought out many visitors, who were in Jerusalem for the Passover, to read it for themselves. The sign was written in three languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

21. Then the chief priests went to Pilate and said, "The sign shouldn't read, 'Jesus, the King of the Jews,' but, 'He said I'm the King of the Jews.'"

22. Pilate replied, "What I have written stays written."

23. Meanwhile, at the crucifixion site, the soldiers who had crucified Jesus took the few things He wore and started dividing them, but when they looked at His warm outside robe, they noticed that it was custom made--seamless--woven from top to bottom.

24. So they said, "This is too expensive a robe to tear apart. Let's gamble for it." This was exactly what David prophesied when he said, "They will divide up my clothes and gamble for my robe." This is exactly what the soldiers did.

25. Standing near the cross, sobbing in great grief, were Jesus' mother, Mary; her sister who was also called Mary, the wife of Cleopas; and Mary Magdalene, the sister of Lazarus.

26. When Jesus saw His mother in tears and John the disciple trying to comfort her, He said, "Mother, don't cry. Take John as your son in my place. He'll take care of you."

27. Then He spoke to John and said, "John, please take care of my mother for me and consider yourself as her son." From that moment on, John took care of Mary and took her home to live with him.

28. Jesus knew that He would soon die and that His mission would be completed just as the Scripture said it would. Yet His sufferings were intense. At one point, He asked for a drink of water.

29. Nearby was a bucket full of cheap wine mixed with a drug to help deaden pain. When the soldiers heard Jesus asking for a drink, they thought He wanted some painkiller. So one of them took a

long stick with a sponge on the end, dipped it in the mixture, and held it up to Jesus' mouth for Him to suck on.

30. When Jesus tasted it, He knew what it was, and spit it out. A few minutes later, He raised His head and cried out with an unusually strong voice, "It is finished!" Then He bowed His head and died.

31. Meanwhile, the Jewish leaders had gone to Pilate, asking him to order his soldiers to break the legs of those who were crucified to hasten their deaths so they could take their bodies down before sunset. They didn't want these men hanging there over the special Sabbath of the Passover.

32. The soldiers carried out Pilate's order and smashed the legs of the first criminal, then the next one.

33. When they came to Jesus, He was already dead. So they did not break His bones.

34. The Roman captain, wanting to make sure that Jesus was dead, picked up a spear, placed its point near Jesus' heart, and jabbed it in. Blood and a clear liquid like water spurted out, showing that Jesus was dead.

35. The one who is writing this gospel was at the cross and saw the crucifixion, and what he's telling you is the truth. He's giving you an accurate account of what really happened so that you can know what to believe.

36. All these things happened just as David in the Psalms predicted when he said, "Not one of His bones will be broken."

37. And as Zechariah said, "They will stand and stare at the One whose heart they punctured."

38. After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a member of the national Jewish council, but secretly a disciple of Jesus, went to see Pilate to ask him if he could take down the body of Jesus and bury it. Pilate gave permission, so Joseph went back to Golgotha to take down the body of Jesus to lay it in a tomb.

39. Also Nicodemus had come; he was the rabbi who had requested a secret meeting with Jesus at night for fear of the Jews. He had brought with him about

seventy-five pounds of burial supplies, including linen grave sheets, spices, and special ointments.

40. Then the three men, Joseph, Nicodemus, and John, carefully took down the body of Jesus and straightened the twisted limbs. Then two of them rubbed the body down with ointments and spices, and wrapped it in linen burial sheets.

41. Not far from the place of crucifixion was a private burial garden with a small new tomb, belonging to Joseph, which had been dug out of the rock.

42. That's where they buried Jesus because it was close by. The sun was already beginning to set, signaling the end of the preparation day and the beginning of the Sabbath.

CHAPTER 20

1. After Jesus' body had rested in the tomb over the Sabbath, and just as it began to dawn early Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and noticed that the huge stone the men had rolled in front of the opening had been rolled back.

2. When she saw what had happened, she turned around and ran back into town to where the disciples were staying. When Peter and John opened the door, she said to them between breaths, "Someone stole our Lord's body! I went to the tomb this morning and someone had rolled away the stone! I'm sure they stole His body. Oh, how I wish I knew what they've done with it."

3. Peter and John ran to the burial site.

4. John ran faster than Peter, however, and got to the tomb first.

5. John didn't go in, but he looked inside and saw the folded grave sheets lying there, but no body.

6. When Peter reached the tomb, he burst right inside. He also saw the folded grave sheets.

7. Then he noticed that the headcloth was not lying on top of the linen sheets as would be expected, but was folded neatly and lying by itself where Jesus' head had been. All this would be strange for thieves to do.

8. Then John also went inside. He also noticed that the neatly folded headcloth

was lying by itself, just as Peter had told him. And he, too, believed.

9. But it still didn't dawn on them that this was what the Old Testament Scriptures had predicted, that Jesus must rise from the dead.

10. After Peter and John had taken a good look, they slowly and sadly walked back to town.

11. Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb and sat crying. Finally, she decided to look inside before going back home.

12. When she did, she saw two angels dressed in white sitting on the stone slab where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the feet.

13. They said to her, "Why are you crying?" Mary answered, "I'm crying because someone stole my Lord's body and I don't know where they took it."

14. Then she turned around and went back outside, still crying, not realizing that she had been talking to angels. As she bent low to go out through the opening, she noticed Someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't look up to see who it was. She just went on outside and sat on the ground. That's why she didn't know that this was Jesus.

15. Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Are you looking for someone?" Mary thought it was the caretaker and said, "Yes, I'm looking for the body of my Lord. Sir, if you know where it is, do tell me. Or if you've moved it and it's not supposed to be in this tomb, please let me know and I'll gladly have someone take care of it for you."

16. Then Jesus spoke to her again, and in His familiar and loving tone of voice simply called her by name: "Mary." Immediately she recognized how her name was said, and looking up in disbelief, she said, "Master, is that you?"

17. Jesus said, "Yes, it is. But I don't have time to stay and talk because I have an appointment with my Father. So don't touch me and hold me back. Just go and tell the disciples that I've ascended to my Father and their Father, to my God and their God."

18. Then Mary ran all the way back to

town and told the disciples that Jesus was alive and that she had seen Him and talked with Him. She also told them what Jesus told her to tell them.

19. Later that same afternoon, the disciples decided to lock themselves in the upper room where they were staying, because they were scared that the resurrection rumors would now make the Jewish leaders come searching for them. Suddenly Jesus stood in the middle of the room and said, "Peace to all of you."

20. He showed them the scars in His hands and the one by His heart. That's when it finally dawned on the disciples that Jesus was really alive and had risen from the dead. Their hearts were filled with unspeakable joy at seeing Jesus.

21. Then He said to them again, "Peace to all of you. Just as my Father sent me on my mission, so I'm sending you on yours."

22. Jesus was happy to see His disciples. As He looked at them, He breathed a sigh of relief that His suffering was all over and said, "From now on the Holy Spirit will be the One to lead you and guide you."

23. Those you decide to take into your fellowship after you see that they've turned from their sinning will also be recognized in heaven as being my disciples. Those who won't turn from their sinning should not be taken into your fellowship and will not be recognized in heaven as being my disciples."

24. Now this particular afternoon, Thomas, who was one of the twelve and sometimes called Didymus, was not in the upper room to see Jesus for himself.

25. So, when he came back to where they were all staying, the disciples were eager to tell him what had happened: "The Lord is alive" they said. "He's risen from the dead! We've seen Him and talked with Him!" Thomas said, "That's impossible! Unless I can personally see Him and see the scars in His hands and can touch them to make sure they're real, and unless I can do the same to the scar by His heart, I refuse to believe what you're saying."

26. A week later, Thomas had the chance to do just that. The disciples were still staying in that same room and keeping the door locked for fear that the Jews

would arrest them next. Suddenly, Jesus stood in the middle of the room and said, "Peace to all of you."

27. Then He looked at Thomas and said, "Come here. Look closely at the scars in my hands and feel them, and then look at the scar by my heart and feel it. This will help you believe that I'm not dead."

28. Thomas stood there speechless. Then he fell to his knees and said, "Lord, you're alive! They were right! Now I have no more doubts. You are the Son of God."

29. Jesus responded, "Thomas, because you've seen me in person, you now believe your brothers that I'm alive. However, there will be those who will not have had the privilege of seeing me in person as you have had; yet they will still believe in my resurrection and be just as thrilled about it as you are."

30. Now there are many other things that Jesus said and did which His disciples personally heard Him say and saw Him do, but they didn't write them all down.

31. The things that they did write down, however, are for you, so that you can have God's word to build your faith on the fact that Jesus Christ was the expected Messiah and that He is the Son of God. Believing this, you can have eternal life because of what He did for you. When He comes again, He will give immortality to all those who love and trust Him.

CHAPTER 21

1. **The** next time the disciples met with Jesus was by the Lake of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberius.

2. About seven of them, Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the two Zebedee brothers, and two other disciples whose names this writer can't recall right now, were there at that time.

3. It all started when Peter decided to go fishing. He announced his intention to the group, and some of the disciples said, "Just wait a minute and we'll go with you." So late that same afternoon, they got into two boats and fished all night without catching a thing.

4. As it dawned, Jesus appeared on the beach, but the disciples didn't recognize Him.

5. As they came closer to shore, Jesus called out to them: "Have you men had anything to eat?" They called back, "No, we haven't! We haven't caught one fish all night!"

6. Then Jesus called back, "Try casting your nets on the right side of your boats. I'll guarantee, you'll catch some." They did, and soon their nets were full of fish, so many that they couldn't pull their nets into the boats.

7. Suddenly, John realized that the Stranger on the beach was Jesus. Turning to Peter, he said, "That's the Lord!" Peter grabbed his robe and quickly put it on, because he was almost naked except for a loincloth. Jumping into the water, he headed straight for Jesus.

8. The boats were still about one-hundred yards from shore, and the other disciples were trying hard not to lose their nets full of fish.

9. When they finally made it to shore, they noticed that Jesus had built a little fire and that He was cooking some fish for them. They also saw that He had little loaves of bread for them to eat.

10. Jesus called to them and said, "You better drag your nets on the beach, so you won't lose your fish. And bring some of them here for breakfast."

11. Peter rushed back and helped them pull the nets onto the beach. The nets were full of all kinds of fish. One net alone had one hundred and fifty three fish in it; yet it hadn't even broken.

12. Then Jesus called them over to breakfast, "Come and get something to eat before these fish get cold." They all came and sat down. No one said a word; no one needed to ask who He was. They all knew this was Jesus.

13. So Jesus served them their breakfast, giving each man a fish and some bread.

14. This was the third time that Jesus had appeared to His disciples since He had risen from the dead.

15. After breakfast, Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Peter, do you think you love me more than these men do?" Peter answered and said, "Lord, you know I'm your friend." Jesus said, "That's good. I want you to take care of my lambs."

16. Then Jesus asked him again, "Peter, how much do you think you love me?" Peter said, "Lord, you know that I'm really truly your friend." Jesus said, "That's good. I want you to take care of my sheep."

17. Then Jesus asked him a third time, "Peter, are you yourself sure you are my friend?" This last question really hurt Peter. With tears in his eyes, Peter said, "Lord, you know everything, and you know how unsure I am of my own heart. You are the only One who knows whether I am really your friend or not." Jesus said, "I know that deep down you're my friend. So I want you to take care of my lambs and sheep."

18. Then Jesus looked at Peter with tears in His eyes and said, "Also, I want to tell you that now, while you're still strong, you can decide what you want to do and where you want to go, and no one seems to be able to stop you. But the time will come when you'll not be as strong as you are now, and that's when someone else will tell you what to do and where to go. They'll even ask you to stretch out your arms, and you'll have no choice but to do it."

19. What Jesus was telling Peter was that in his later years, he would be arrested and crucified by the Romans just as his Master was. Then Jesus said, "But whatever happens, don't lose sight of me."

20. Later that morning as the disciples were walking along the beach with Jesus, Peter, who was walking next to Him, turned around and saw John walking close behind. Now this was the same John who at the Passover supper sat next to Jesus and had asked Him which one of the disciples would be betraying Him.

21. Peter was always interested in John, so he asked Jesus, "Lord, what does this man's future hold, and what are you going to ask him to do for you?"

22. Jesus answered, "If I wanted him to live until I come back, he would. But what you need to do is to keep your eyes on me, not on him or on anyone else."

23. Then the rumor got started among the other disciples that John would never die. But that was not what Jesus had said.

All He had said was, "If I wanted him to live until I come back again, he would."

24. I am this John they were talking about, and I am the one who has been writing this gospel. Everything in this gospel is the truth.

25. Now there are numerous other

experiences that we've had with Jesus that I could write about, but what I've recorded here for you are the most important ones, and they far outweigh in value all the books in the world. And that is how it should be. Amen.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

CHAPTER 1

1. Dear Theophilus, my first book that I sent to you told you all about Jesus, what He did, and what He taught from the beginning of His ministry

2. until the day He was taken up into heaven, but only after He had given instructions to His chosen apostles, promising them the Holy Spirit.

3. Also, I told you that for forty days after His resurrection, He stayed here on earth and appeared to His apostles many times until they were convinced beyond all doubt that He was alive. He talked and ate with them and shared many more things with them about God's kingdom.

4. At their last meeting together, He told them to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit and that the Father would send the Spirit just as He had promised, and reminded them that He had mentioned this to them before.

5. He Also told them that, although John the Baptist had baptized them with water, in just a few days they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit.

6. So they asked if that would be the time when He would set up Israel as a world kingdom.

7. He said that it wasn't important for them to know just when all things would happen, but that the Father was in charge and He would decide when to usher in the kingdom.

8. In the meantime, they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach the good news of salvation to everyone, first in Jerusalem, then in Judea, next in Samaria, and finally to the whole world.

9. After the meeting was over, they walked through the city and made their way out of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives. As He was saying goodbye to them, He started to slowly lift up off the ground and on up into the sky until a cloud came and covered Him and they lost sight of Him.

10. While the apostles were standing there trying to catch another glimpse of Him, suddenly two men dressed in white robes stood next to them and said,

11. "Why are you standing here looking up to heaven? Are you waiting for Him to come back? When He does come back, he'll come the same way you saw Him go."

12. So the apostles left the Mount of Olives and made their way back to Jerusalem, which was only a short distance away.

13. Now in this book, let me tell you who they were and what they did, plus my own experiences with a man named Paul. After Jesus left them, all eleven of the apostles went back to the upper room where they had been meeting. They were Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, the son of Alphaeus, Simon the patriot, and the other Judas, the son of James.

14. They had come to pray together and were soon joined by some of the women who had followed Jesus, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and His stepbrothers.

15. A day or so later, the apostles called all the believers together, about one hundred of them, and when they were all gathered, Peter stood up and said,

16. "Brothers and sisters, the Scripture was fulfilled, and things happened just as the Holy Spirit predicted when He spoke through David and said that Judas would serve as a guide for those who arrested Jesus.

17. Now, as you remember, Judas became one of the first disciples to follow Jesus because we urged Him to make him part of the group.

18. Also, you know that a field was bought with the money Judas received from selling Jesus. And that's where they buried him after they found that he had hanged himself from a tree just outside the city walls. You remember how the rope had broken and his swollen body had fallen and burst open, so that dogs were eating his insides. It was a horrible sight.

19. Everyone in Jerusalem knows about this and they now call that field, Akeldama, which means "field of blood."

20. As it says in the Psalms, "Let the place of those who had part in the death of

the Messiah become empty and let there be no one to live in it." And another Psalm says, "Let others replace those who were against the Lord."

21. So we need to choose a replacement for Judas and it should be someone who has been with us all the time, since the beginning of Jesus' ministry until now.

22. He should be a person who saw John baptize Jesus, who saw Christ alive after His crucifixion, and who was with us when we saw Him ascend to heaven."

23. The group followed Peter's suggestion and picked out two men, Joseph, called Barsabbas, also called Justus, and Matthias.

24. Then the believers prayed earnestly and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two men you have chosen to replace Judas.

25. We want him to serve as an apostle and take Judas' place, who left the ministry and went his own way."

26 After they prayed, they drew lots to see which one should replace Judas, and the lot fell on Matthias. He was then officially added to the group as one of the twelve. However, some feel that God's choice was Paul.

CHAPTER 2

1. A few days later, on the day of Pentecost, all the believers met in one place to worship and to pray. They had only one thing in mind, to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as Jesus had asked them to do.

2. Suddenly they heard a sound outside like a strong wind, and it came into the house where they were staying.

3. Then they saw small flames of fire coming into the room and hovering over the head of each of them.

4. They were filled with the Spirit and were enabled to talk in other languages as the Spirit empowered them to speak.

5. This happened at the time when devout Jews from all over the Roman Empire were visiting Jerusalem and staying for the feast.

6. Other people, too, heard the noise of this strange wind and the word spread throughout the city that something unusual had happened, and soon a large crowd

had gathered outside the house where the apostles were meeting. When the apostles came out to speak to them, the people were amazed that each person heard them speak in his own language.

7. They said, "This is incredible! Aren't all these men Galileans?

8. And if that's the case, how can we all hear them speak to us in our own languages at the same time?"

9. People there were from Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, and from different parts of Asia.

10. Others had come from Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, from parts of Libya near Cyrene, and from Rome. Both Jews and converts to Judaism were there.

11. Some had even come from Crete and Arabia. Yet all of them heard the apostles speak to them in their own language or dialect and all at the same time. They said, "This can only come from God!"

12. While everyone marveled, soon some of them began to say, "This is impossible! We're just making ourselves hear things."

13. Then others joined in and started laughing and said, "What's really happened is that these men are drunk. We just think we're hearing them speak in our own language, but that's not the case at all!"

14. Then Peter, standing with the other eleven apostles, spoke to the crowd and said, "Men of Judah, and all you who are visiting here, listen to me. Let me tell you what this is all about.

15. We're not drunk as some of you think. After all, it's only nine o'clock in the morning.

16. What you're seeing should not amaze you because this is a fulfilment of the first part of Joel's prophecy when he spoke for God, saying,

17. 'This is what I will do in the days ahead. I will pour out my Spirit on ordinary people. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message. I will speak to your young men in visions and to your old men in dreams.

18. I will also give my Spirit to household servants, to men and women alike,

and they, too, will proclaim my message.

19. And in the last days I will perform miracles on the earth and in the sky. The sky will turn red like blood, and fire and smoke will fill the air.

20. Even the sun will stop shining and the moon, too, will look like blood. All this will happen before the Day of Judgment.

21. And whoever calls on me for help will be saved.'

22. So listen to these words of the prophet and take them to heart, you men of Israel, and know what he's telling you. Jesus of Nazareth was sent here by God, and was certified by the Father by all the miracles and other wonderful things He did for us through Jesus, as you yourselves know.

23. Yet, this is the Man whom our own leaders took and turned over to the Romans for crucifixion, and God knew about this and allowed it to happen.

24. Then the Father resurrected Him by breaking the power of death. Death itself could no longer hold Him.

25. David spoke with respect to Him when he said, 'I have seen the hand of the Lord in my life, and because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

26. That's why my heart is glad and my voice full of melody. That's why I can rest in the hope that my body will live again.

27. God will not let me perish forever. He will not let His own Son rot away in the grave.

28. God has guided me all my life and in His presence there is nothing but fullness of joy.'

29. Brothers, let me make it plain what this means. Our forefather David is dead, and his body is buried right here in Jerusalem. His flesh has rotted away, but his bones are still with us.

30. He was not only a king, but also a prophet. So he knew what God had promised to do for His kingdom and also that God had confirmed it by an oath. The promise God made was that one of David's own descendants would come and take the throne and occupy it forever.

31. This king would be the Messiah who would come, would die, and would be

raised from the dead, and His body would not decay.

32. This Jesus is the very One! He died and God raised Him from the dead, and we are all witnesses to this fact.

33. And now He's ascended to heaven where He sits next to God the Father, who promised to send the Holy Spirit in full power to help us preach the good news about His Son. This is what He did, and the result is what you see this morning.

34. David wasn't resurrected and did not ascend to heaven and sit next to God. David was talking about Someone else when he said, 'The Lord God will say to my Lord, come, and sit next to me.

35. And stay here until your work is done, your servants have been sealed, and the kingdom is yours.'

36. That's why all Israel needs to know for sure that this Jesus, whom our leaders turned over to the Romans for crucifixion, is both the Lord and the Messiah whom David talked about."

37. Now when the people heard this, they felt guilty and their hearts were troubled. So they called out to Peter and to the other apostles and said, "Brothers, now what do we do?"

38. Peter answered, "You need to confess and forsake your sins and turn your life over to God. Then you should be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as a sign that you've been forgiven and you too, will receive the Holy Spirit.

39. All the promises that God gave us are for you, too, and they're for your children. And this includes all Israelites no matter how far away from Jerusalem they live, and for anyone else who calls on God for help."

40. Peter continued encouraging them, appealing to their hearts, and urging them to give themselves to God and not to take part in the nation's sin of rejecting the Messiah.

41. Many believed what Peter said and responded to his appeal. Then about three thousand of them decided to be baptized and were added to the church.

42. All of them clung steadfastly to what they were taught. They enjoyed fellowship together, ate together, shared their

food, and prayed for one another.

43. Then the apostles started working miracles, and healing all kinds of diseases, and everyone who saw them was amazed at what was happening.

44. The believers were such a closely knit group that they even shared their possessions with one another.

45. Some sold their properties and gave the money to the apostles so they could distribute it to others who needed it.

46. Every day they went to the Temple to pray. Gladly they shared their food and invited others to their homes to eat. They did all this humbly and with gratitude.

47. They were always happy and were always thanking God for His blessings. As a result they enjoyed the good will of neighbors and friends. Every day more believers were added to the church as they responded to the promptings of the Holy Spirit for them to be saved.

CHAPTER 3

1. One day, about three o'clock in the afternoon, Peter and John went to the Temple to pray.

2. When they came to the Temple gate called Beautiful, a man who had been crippled from birth was sitting at the gate begging for money. He did this every day.

3. He saw Peter and John coming, and just as they were about to walk through the gate, he stopped them also and begged for money.

4. Peter and John looked at the man and said, "Look at us and listen to what we have to say."

5. The man looked up at them and listened, hoping they would give him some money.

6. Peter said, "We don't have any gold or silver to give you, but we'll give you what we have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, I'm asking you to stand up and walk."

7. Then he reached down and took the man's hand to help him up. Instantly the man's feet and ankles straightened out and were made strong.

8. In fact, he literally jumped to his feet. He then went with Peter and John on into the Temple, jumping and praising God

as he went.

9. All the people saw this man leaping and praising God.

10. They also recognized him as the crippled man who usually sat in front of the gate called Beautiful, and now they could hardly believe what they were seeing.

11. The man went with Peter and John all the way into the Temple to what was called Solomon's Porch, and he held on to them as the people crowded in to see whether this was real.

12. When Peter saw what was happening, he took the opportunity to speak to the crowd and said, "Men of Israel, why are you staring at us? Do you think this man was healed because some kind of power or force is inside of us?"

13. Let me tell you that the God who was worshiped by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who led our fathers out of Egypt, is the same God who sent His Son Jesus Christ to save us. But you let our leaders turn Him over to the Romans, and then in front of Pilate, you shouted for His execution when he wanted to set Him free.

14. Jesus was holy and good, but you rejected Pilate's offer and demanded that he release Barabbas the murderer instead.

15. So, in effect you were the ones who killed the only One who could give you life. But God raised Him from the dead, and we are witnesses to that fact.

16. It was in the name of Jesus that we healed this man and were able to make him well. What you have seen happened through his faith in Jesus Christ, who is the Source of all life and power. That's why he stands in front of you so well and strong.

17. Now I know, my brothers, that what you and our leaders did to Jesus you did out of ignorance.

18. God knew long ago that this would happen. He even predicted through His prophets that the Messiah would come and be killed. That is exactly what happened.

19. So I'm asking you to repent, to turn your lives around, to confess your sins. God will forgive you and refresh your souls by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to all who love Him and accept

Him as their Lord.

20. And this is the Christ who was appointed to be your Savior.

21. He is the same One who is now in heaven and will stay there until it is time for God to restore all things, which through His prophets He promised to do.

22. This is what Moses had in mind when he said to our fathers, 'The Lord our God will send you a greater Prophet and Leader, and He will choose Him from among you. When He comes, you are to listen to Him and do everything He tells you to do.'

23. And anyone who does not obey that Prophet will have to be discounted as being one of God's people and eventually suffer the consequences of his sins.'

24. And other prophets like Samuel, and those who came later, all foresaw these events.

25. Now, you belong to the people to whom God sent the prophets and gave the covenant. God said to Abraham, 'Through your Offspring everyone in the whole world will receive a blessing.'

26. The good news of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ and how He raised Him from the dead we're sharing with you because we want you to repent and turn from your wicked ways."

CHAPTER 4

1. While Peter and John were talking to the people, the officer in charge of the Temple guard, together with some priests and Sadducees, came and interrupted them.

2. They were upset because the two disciples were telling the people that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

3. So they arrested Peter and John and put them in jail until the next morning, because it was already too late in the day to hold a trial.

4. But many of the people believed what the apostles had said and accepted Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Almost overnight, the number of men who believed grew to five thousand, and this does not include women and children.

5. The next morning, the Jewish leaders called together the elders and teachers

of the law for a council meeting.

6. Annas, the retired High Priest; Caia-phas, his son-in-law, who was the officiating High Priest; and John, Alexander, and others who were part of the high priestly family, had the apostles brought in for questioning.

7. They stood the two apostles in the middle of the room and questioned them, saying, "By what power or name did you heal this man?"

8. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, answered and said, "Honored leaders, elders, and teachers of our people,

9. if we are being examined about a good deed done to a crippled man, and if we are being asked by what means he was healed,

10. you have a right to know, and the people have a right to know, that he was not healed by any power that we have. But he was healed through the name of Jesus Christ, whom you consented to have crucified and whom God raised from the dead. It was the power of Jesus Christ that healed this man who is standing here before you.

11. Jesus Christ is the Stone which you rejected as being worthless. But like the stone in Solomon's time that was first laid aside and then found to be the perfect cornerstone for the Temple, so this Man Jesus has now been found to be the Chief Cornerstone on which everything else rests.

12. So all healing and salvation comes only through Him, because there is no one else in the whole world who can save us."

13. When the leaders and elders saw the boldness of Peter and John, knowing that they were uneducated fishermen, they were amazed at their conduct, their manner of speech, and their ability to speak in public. Then they realized that these men had been with Jesus and had been trained and taught by Him.

14. And seeing the healed man standing in front of them, they were speechless and had nothing more to say.

15. Finally, they asked the apostles and the man who was healed to leave so they could discuss the situation among themselves.

16. Then they asked one another, "What

should we do with these men? There is no doubt they have worked a miracle and the crippled man is healed. Already everyone in Jerusalem knows about it. So now what are we going to do?

17. Somehow we must keep the news of this thing from spreading. So let's give these men a stern warning not to do this again and to stop preaching about Jesus Christ."

18. Then they called the apostles and the man back in and ordered them to stop healing and teaching the people about Jesus.

19. Peter and John spoke up and said, "Whether it's more important to listen to God or to men, you'll have to decide.

20. As for ourselves, we have decided that if people ask us what happened yesterday at the Temple, or if they ask us to tell them more about Jesus, we have no choice but to tell them the truth of what we've seen and heard."

21. Then the authorities warned them again not to heal or to teach and let them go. They could find nothing to punish the apostles for, and beside this, the people were praising God for what these men had done.

22. After all, the man who was healed was more than forty years old, and everyone knew that he had been a cripple all his life.

23. As soon as the apostles were released, they went back to their meeting place in the city and told the believers everything that had happened and everything the leaders and elders had said to them.

24. When the group heard this, they all joined together and, with one mind and heart, lifted up their voices and prayed: "Lord God, you are the Creator of everything in heaven, on earth, and in the sea.

25. You are also the One who spoke by the Holy Spirit through our father David when he said, 'Why are the unbelievers so furious and why do they make useless decisions and keep plotting against God?

26. Even the kings of the earth and local rulers have joined together to stand against the Lord God and against his Anointed One.'

27. This is exactly what happened as soon as Jesus was born and when he was crucified. First Herod with his soldiers and then Pilate together with the local rulers joined forces to carry out their plot against Him.

28. They simply did what God knew would happen.

29. Lord, they have now threatened us and told us not to speak. We pray that you will give your servants courage and enable us to speak your message with boldness.

30. Also continue to give us power to heal the sick so the attention of the people might be drawn to your Son Jesus. And we will do all these miracles in His name."

31. As soon as they had finished praying, the place where they were staying started to shake. Everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit's power, and they were given courage and boldness to speak the truth.

32. As the group had only one purpose in mind, their hearts were knit together as if they were all one. Also, they shared with one another everything they owned.

33. So with great power, the apostles preached about Jesus and about His resurrection, and God richly blessed all that they did.

34. Not one person was in their group who did not have his needs cared for. Those who owned property or houses sold them and gave the entire sale's proceeds to help feed the members, especially those who had lost their jobs because of their belief in Jesus.

35. And they turned their funds over to the apostles, who distributed them to each one needing help.

36. Now one of the believers who did this was Joseph, a Levite born in Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, meaning, "the one who encourages others."

37. Barnabas also sold the property he owned and took the entire sale's proceeds and gave it to the apostles.

CHAPTER 5

1. Now in the group was a man called Ananias, who together with his wife Sapphira, agreed to help by selling some

property they owned.

2. However, Ananias and his wife decided to keep part of the sale's proceeds for themselves since they got more for the property than had been expected. Then Ananias took the amount which seemed reasonable to him and brought it to the apostles and gave the impression that it was the entire sum.

3. When he handed it to the apostles, Peter said, "Ananias, why did you let Satan control you and make you lie to the Holy Spirit? Why are you giving us the impression that this is the full amount you sold the property for, when you know it's only part of it?"

4. Now, before you sold the property, it was yours to sell or not to sell. And after it was sold, was not the money at your disposal to do with it as you wanted? But since you told the Holy Spirit you would give the full amount and then decided to give only part of it, you gave a false impression of your generosity to everyone and publicly lied to us and to the Holy Spirit."

5. When Ananias realized that Peter knew what he had done, he collapsed and died. The word spread among the believers and instilled in everyone enormous respect for the Holy Spirit's presence.

6. Then Peter called in some of the young men of the church and asked them to wrap up the body and carry it out and bury it.

7. About three hours later, Sapphira came in, having no idea what had happened.

8. She asked to see Peter, and when he met her, he said, "Tell me, for how much did you and your husband sell the property? Was it for this much?" And she said, "Why, yes, it was."

9. Then Peter said to her, "Why did you two agree to lie about the whole thing? What were you trying to do? A few hours ago your husband fell over dead when he found out that we knew, and the young men who buried him are coming to carry you out."

10. When Sapphira heard this, she, too, collapsed and died. And when the young men who had buried her husband came in

and saw her dead, they wrapped her up, carried her out, and buried her next to her husband.

11. As word about this spread through the ranks of the believers, a holy awe came upon the whole church.

12. In addition to this witness of the Holy Spirit's presence among them, the apostles worked numerous miracles, healing people of all kinds of diseases. Every day they continued to meet together in the shaded walk around the Temple called Solomon's Porch.

13. However, no one outside the group dared to meet with them there, even though they held the apostles in highest esteem, because they were afraid that the authorities would arrest them, too.

14. But throughout the city more and more people were joining the church, men and women alike.

15. And Peter became so well known in Jerusalem that people brought their sick and left them in the streets in the hope that, as Peter passed, his shadow would fall on them and heal them.

16. Also, people from the towns and villages around Jerusalem brought their sick, including some who were demon possessed, and the apostles healed all of them.

17. This popularity of the apostles made the High Priest and his sympathizers, who belonged to the Sadducee party, feel so threatened that they decided to do something.

18. They ordered the apostles arrested and put in jail.

19. But that night the Lord sent an angel to open the jail doors to let them out. The angel said to them,

20. "Early tomorrow morning the Lord wants you to go back to the Temple and tell the people all about Jesus and this new life."

21. The apostles obeyed, and at the first sign of dawn, they made their way to the Temple to preach. When the High Priest came to work, not knowing what had happened the night before, he called together the full Jewish council, including the elders, and then asked the Temple

guard to bring in the apostles for questioning.

22. But when the officers and their men came to the prison where the apostles had been locked up, they found their cells empty. They rushed back to the council and said,

23. "When we got to the prison, we found everything locked up and all the guards at their posts, but when we opened the cells, we found they were empty!"

24. While the High Priest and the commander of the guard were wondering how such a thing could happen,

25. a man came rushing in and shouted, "Listen! The men you put in jail yesterday are standing outside in the Temple courtyard teaching the people about Jesus!"

26. The Council told the officers and their guards to go arrest the apostles and bring them in. They did so, but without violence, because they were afraid that the people might stone them.

27. When the apostles were brought in, the Council had them stand in the center of the court-room, and the High Priest started questioning them.

28. "Didn't we warn you once not to preach or teach the people openly about this Man Jesus Christ? And what have you done? You've preached about Him all over the city! What are you trying to do, make the people believe that we were responsible for killing Him?"

29. Peter and the apostles spoke up and said, "We must obey God rather than men.

30. The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead, whom you killed by turning Him over to the Romans.

31. But God exalted Him and had Him sit on His right hand as Lord and Savior to give us repentance and forgiveness of sins.

32. We're simply telling the people what we've witnessed, and the Holy Spirit, whom God gives to all who obey Him, is doing the same thing through others."

33. To the council members, these words were as a knife cutting into their hearts; they decided that the apostles should be executed.

34. Now one of the council members, a Pharisee called Gamaliel, who was highly respected by the people as a teacher, stood

up and asked the apostles to be taken outside.

35. Then he addressed the council and said, "Men of Israel, be careful what you do to these men.

36. Remember that before Jesus of Nazareth came along, a man called Theudas appeared, claiming to be the 'Deliverer'. He had about four hundred men ready to fight and free Israel. But he was soon killed. His followers were scattered, and the whole movement died out.

37. After him came Judas, a Galilean, who started a movement during the last Roman census. He and his zealots also drew crowds of people, but he was soon killed, and his followers, too, were scattered.

38. So in this case, don't take any action against these men. It will only draw attention to their cause. Just leave them alone, because if they started this movement on their own, it'll fail just as the others did.

39. But if their movement was started by God, you can't stop it no matter what you do. You might even find yourselves fighting against God."

40. The Council listened and agreed that what Gamaliel said made sense. Then they had the apostles brought back in, told them never to speak to the people about Jesus again, and ordered them whipped and released.

41. After the apostles were set free, they went home rejoicing, because it was a privilege to suffer innocently for Jesus.

42. The next day they went right back to preaching and teaching the people about Jesus, both in the Temple and in their homes, sharing with them the good news that He was the Messiah.

CHAPTER 6

1. **Now**, as the number of believers grew, there was a disagreement between the Greek-speaking Jews and the local Jews. The Greek-speaking Jews claimed that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

2. So the twelve apostles called the believers together and said to them, "It's not right for us to stop preaching and to spend so much time listening to disputes

and distributing money.

3. What you need to do, brothers, is to choose seven men from among yourselves who have received the Holy Spirit and have good judgment and put them in charge of this kind of ministry.

4. This will free us to give more time to study, prayer, and preaching the word."

5. The believers were pleased with the apostles' suggestions. The first one they chose was Stephen, a man of strong faith and one who had received the Holy Spirit. The others who were chosen were: Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

6. The believers presented these men to the apostles, who prayed for them and then ordained them to this special ministry.

7. So the word of God continued to be preached with power, and every day new believers were added to the church in Jerusalem, including a considerable number of priests.

8. **Stephen** not only functioned as a deacon, but was also filled with the Holy Spirit to preach and was given power to work miracles and heal the sick.

9. Soon he was challenged by men from Cyrene and Alexandria who were called Freedmen because they had been slaves and were now free. These and other Greek-speaking Jews from Cilicia and Asia started arguing with Stephen.

10. But the Holy Spirit gave Stephen such wisdom that, when he answered their challenges, they were speechless.

11. So they bribed a couple of men to say that they had heard Stephen curse Moses and the God of Israel.

12. In this way they were able to stir up the people against him and at the same time get the attention of the city fathers and the teachers of the law. So the authorities had Stephen arrested and brought before the Council.

13. Then the false witnesses were brought in to accuse him of blasphemy. They said, "This man never stops talking against the Temple and everything that Moses taught us.

14. We heard him say that Jesus of

Nazareth will come back and destroy the Temple and change everything that Moses taught."

15. When the council members looked at Stephen standing in the middle of the courtroom, they noticed that his face was so radiant, it looked like the face of an angel.

CHAPTER 7

1. Then the High Priest asked Stephen, "Is all this true what these men say about you?"

2. Stephen answered politely, "Fellow citizens, brothers, fathers, kindly listen to what I have to say. Centuries ago God appeared to Abraham before he left Mesopotamia to live in Haran.

3. And He said to him, 'Leave your relatives and your country and go live in a land that I will show you.'

4. So Abraham left Mesopotamia for a while and lived in Haran until his father died; then he moved here to this country where we now live.

5. Now God did not give him possession of the land as soon as he got here, but promised to give him the whole country which would then belong to him and to his descendants forever. This was before he even had any children.

6. Actually, God said to Abraham, 'Your descendants will first be treated as foreigners. They will be made slaves and be forced to serve another nation for about four-hundred years.

7. Then I will judge that nation which enslaved them and free my people and bring them out to serve me in this land.'

8. So God made a covenant with Abraham, which included circumcision. Eight days after Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him, and in turn Isaac circumcised his son Jacob, and Jacob circumcised his sons, who became the heads of our twelve tribes.

9. Later, Jacob's sons became jealous of Joseph and sold him as a slave to be taken in a caravan to Egypt. And God was with him.

10. He stood by Joseph in all his troubles and gave him favor before the king of Egypt. The king recognized the wisdom

of Joseph and made him governor over all of Egypt and manager of the royal house.

11. Then the famine came which spread over all the land of Egypt and Canaan and caused great suffering, so that even Jacob and his sons could not find food.

12. When Jacob heard that there was food in Egypt, he sent his sons down to buy some.

13. Later, he sent them down again, and that's when Joseph told his brothers who he was. When Pharaoh heard about it, he gave Joseph permission to bring his whole family to Egypt.

14. So Joseph sent for his father Jacob and invited him and everyone in the family, seventy-five of them, to come and live in Egypt.

15. Then Jacob and his sons moved to Egypt where they all lived and where they all died.

16. Later their bodies were carried to Schechem where they were buried in the cave that Abraham bought from the people of Hamor for cash.

17. Now when the time came for God to carry out the promise He had made to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had grown so large that we formed a small nation.

18. Then another Pharaoh came to the throne who refused to acknowledge what Joseph had done for Egypt.

19. He dealt craftily with our people and even forced them to kill their babies.

20. It was during this time that Moses was born. He was a beautiful baby and his parents succeeded in hiding him at home for three months.

21. When he was put outside to die, Pharaoh's daughter found him, took him out of the basket, and adopted him as her own.

22. She educated and trained him in all the wisdom and military arts of the Egyptians, and he became a great leader in everything he did.

23. Now when Moses was about forty years old, he was determined to find out first-hand how his fellow Israelites were doing and how they were being treated.

24. While visiting one of the worksites, he saw one of his brothers being mistreated

by an Egyptian foreman. So he went over to defend his brother and killed the Egyptian.

25. He was hoping that this incident would be understood by his brothers as a sign that God had sent him to deliver them and that they would rally around him.

26. So the next day he went down to the work sites again and this time found two Israelites fighting with each other. He went over and separated them and said, 'Listen to me, men. You two are brothers, not enemies. You shouldn't be fighting like this.'

27. But the one who was beating up his brother pushed Moses away and said, 'Who do you think you are, telling us what to do? You walk around here as if you were a ruler or a judge.'

28. So now are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?'

29. Then Moses knew that the Israelites had misunderstood his intentions and were not willing to accept his leadership to deliver them. So he fled the country and went to live in the land of Midian, where he married and had two sons.

30. Forty years later, God spoke to him out of the flames of a burning bush in the wasteland near Mt. Sinai.

31. When Moses saw that this bush kept on burning, he went over to it to see how this could be. When he came close, the Lord spoke to him out of the bush and said,

32. 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' When Moses heard this, he was afraid and started to shake all over and didn't dare to look in the direction of the fire.

33. The Lord continued, 'Take off your sandals because the ground on which you're standing is holy.' And Moses obeyed.

34. Then the Lord said, 'I've seen how cruelly my people are being treated in Egypt. I've heard their prayers and I've listened to their groanings. So now I've decided to set them free and I'm sending you to Egypt to bring them out.'

35. Moses remembered how years before the people had rejected his leadership when they said to him, 'Who made you a

ruler and a judge over us?' Yet this Moses, whom God sent to our people, was made our ruler and judge by the Angel in the bush.

36. He obeyed and went back to Egypt. God was with him and helped him as He promised He would. And the Lord worked miracles through Moses and did many marvelous things, first in Egypt, then at the Red Sea, and finally in the wilderness for the next forty years.

37. Now Moses was the one who said to the children of Israel, 'The Lord God will cause to appear a Prophet from among you to be your Leader, just as he did with me.'

38. The Leader Moses was talking about was the same One who spoke to him out of the burning bush and who led the children of Israel for forty years in the wilderness. He was the same One who spoke to them from Mt. Sinai and gave them the Ten Commandments.

39. This was the same Spokesman for God whom our fathers refused to listen to when they wanted to go back to Egypt.

40. That's when they told Aaron, 'Make us gods whom we can see and who can lead us safely back to Egypt. Moses brought us out of Egypt, but he's been up in the mountain for forty days, and who knows if he's still alive!'

41. That's when they made a god shaped like a bull, offered sacrifices to it, and held a feast and worshiped an idol they had made with their own hands.

42. So God turned away from them and let them do what they desired, so that they even worshiped the stars of heaven. Later one of the prophets spoke for God and said, 'People of Israel, was it to me only that you sacrificed animals during your forty years in the wilderness?

43. It wasn't only to me that you brought your sacrifices, because in your hearts you also worshiped the god Moloch and you did the same for the god Rephan when you worshiped him as the star god. You even carved figurines of these gods and then worshiped these pieces of wood, asking them to bless you. So I had no choice but to stop protecting you in your sinning and let the Babylonians come and

take you into exile.'

44. Now before this, our forefathers had the portable Sanctuary with them in the wilderness. It was made by Moses but patterned after the Sanctuary in heaven which God had let him see.

45. Our people carried this portable Sanctuary with them everywhere they went until, under Joshua's leadership, they had taken over the land of Canaan. They had worshiped at the tent Sanctuary all through the years until the time of David.

46. Now David, who was a man after God's own heart, wanted to build a permanent Sanctuary, a Temple, for God. So he asked Him for permission.

47. But God said, 'No', and gave the privilege of building the Temple to Solomon.

48. But we all know that the Most High God can't be confined to buildings. As one of the prophets, speaking for Him, said,

49. 'Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What Temple can you build for me that will hold me? What place is there that can confine me?

50. I am greater than any building of wood and stone, because I am the One who created all things.'"

51. When Stephen saw how enraged the council members became when he said that the Temple was not as important as the actual presence of God, he cut short his speech and said, "How stiffnecked and stubborn can you leaders be? Your ears are no better than those of the Egyptians who refused to listen to God and to let His people go. And you're resisting the Holy Spirit today just as your fathers did in the wilderness.

52. Has there ever been a prophet whom your fathers didn't mistreat or persecute? They even had some of them killed after they had prophesied about the coming of the Messiah. This happened just recently again in the case of John the Baptist, who told you who the Messiah was. And to make things worse, you turned the Just One over to the Romans to be crucified. This makes you both traitors and murderers.

53. You claim you are the ones who

have been charged with safeguarding God's law which was handed down to us from heaven. But you yourselves pay no attention to it and don't even make an attempt to keep it."

54. When the council members heard this, they were beside themselves with anger. Their national pride was so hurt that they actually ground their teeth in rage.

55. But Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and was given a glimpse of God in all His glory with Jesus standing beside Him. And he said,

56. "Look! I can see into heaven, and I see Jesus, the Son of Man, standing at the right side of God!"

57. When the council members heard that, they shouted, "Stop him!" and they put their fingers in their ears to keep from hearing this supposed blasphemy and rushed toward him like madmen.

58. They pushed him out of the courtroom and through the streets of Jerusalem until they were outside the city. They took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young council member named Saul.

59. Then they picked up any stone they could find and stoned him to death. While they were doing this, Stephen put his hand over his head and cried out, "Lord Jesus, I put myself in your hands! Receive my spirit!"

60. As he sank down to his knees, he cried out again and said, "Lord Jesus, please don't hold this against them!" Then he slumped over and died.

CHAPTER 8

1. Now Saul, the young council member standing there watching all this, had consented to the stoning of Stephen, and from that day on he became the leader of the most cruel persecution of the church, beginning right there in Jerusalem. As a result, the believers left town and scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, until in the end only the apostles were left.

2. Now some of the devout believers had watched from a distance when Stephen was stoned. So after the crowd had left, they went and, with tears and loud mourning, took his body and buried it.

3. But as I mentioned before, Saul was determined to destroy the church and personally went from house to house searching for believers, dragging them out, and sending them to prison, men and women alike.

4. In the meanwhile, the believers who had left town scattered everywhere preaching the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. Now Philip, one of the deacons, left Judea and went to Samaria to preach Christ.

6. The people there listened to what he had to say, because he not only preached the gospel, but worked miracles as well.

7. He even healed those who were demon possessed, and when he did, the demons would come out of people with loud, earth-shattering shrieks. Also, he healed many who were paralyzed and deformed.

8. As a result, a wave of joy and happiness swept over the whole city.

9. Now in this same city, there was a man called Simon who had made a good living by practicing witchcraft and making the most extravagant claims for himself.

10. It seemed as though everyone listened to him and did what he said, from the city officials on down to the common man in the street. They all believed that his power came from God and even called him, "the man with the power of God."

11. The other reason why so many in the city paid attention to him was that he had been practicing his witchcraft for a long time.

12. But when the people heard the good news from Philip about the kingdom of God and about God's Son Jesus Christ, many of them accepted the message, and scores of them were baptized, both men and women alike.

13. Even Simon accepted the message and was baptized. Then he followed Philip everywhere he went, watching every move he made, observing with amazement the miracles he saw him do.

14. Now when the apostles back in Jerusalem heard what was going on in Samaria and how so many people were accepting the gospel, they sent Peter and

John to see what was happening.

15. When they arrived, they earnestly prayed that the new believers would be given the Holy Spirit.

16. They had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ but had not yet received the gifts and the power of the Spirit.

17. So when Peter and John prayed for them and laid their hands on them, they were given the Holy Spirit.

18. When Simon saw that by the simple laying on of hands the power of the Holy Spirit was given to the believers, he offered to pay Peter and John to give him power to do the same thing.

19. He said, "Please sell me this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands will receive the Holy Spirit."

20. Then Peter looked at him and said, "If you think you can buy the Holy Spirit so that you can use His gifts to make yourself rich, then may you and your money perish in the fires of hell.

21. Your attitude shows that your heart is not in the right place and that you are not really converted. And if that's true, there's no way that you can have a part in God's work.

22. What you need to do is to repent and change your life and get right with God. Ask Him to forgive you for even thinking of such a thing as you proposed.

23. It's obvious to anyone watching you that you're bitterly jealous of what we're doing and that you're controlled by the power of sin and not by the power of God."

24. Then Simon said to Peter and John, "Please pray for me that none of the things you said may happen to me." But his repentance wasn't genuine because for years afterward he followed Peter wherever he went to trouble him.

25. Now on their way back to Jerusalem, the two apostles continued preaching the word of God and giving their testimony about Christ in a number of towns and villages throughout Samaria.

26. Then the angel of the Lord said to Philip, "I want you to leave this area, go south past Jerusalem, and then take the road that goes from there to Gaza. This will lead you into the desert toward Egypt."

27. So Philip said goodbye to the believers and left. He kept going south on the Desert Road as the angel had told him. Now the minister of finance for the queen of Ethiopia had come to Jerusalem to worship.

28. He was on his way back home. While he was slowly going along in his chariot, he was reading the book of Isaiah out loud and trying to understand what it said.

29. As the chariot came near to where Philip was, the Holy Spirit said to him, "When this chariot comes up to you, I will tell you what to do."

30. So when the chariot came up alongside Philip, he began to run with it and heard this man reading from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. He was reading about a man being slaughtered like a sheep. Then the Holy Spirit prompted Philip, who called out to the man and said, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

31. The treasury official said, "How can I understand these Jewish expressions unless someone helps me!" Then he ordered the driver to stop his chariot and asked Philip if he would come up and help him understand what Isaiah meant.

32. The passage of Scripture the man couldn't understand said, "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb standing in front of its shearers unable to speak, so He had nothing to say.

33. He was humiliated and they showed Him no pity and gave Him no justice. He will leave no descendants because they ended His life right there."

34. So as they rode along, the official showed Philip the passage and said, "Who is the prophet talking about? Himself, or someone else?"

35. Then Philip explained the passage to him and told him all about Jesus.

36. As they traveled on down the road, they came to a place that had a small pool of water. The Ethiopian said, "Look, there's a pool of water! Is there any reason why I can't be baptized right here?"

37. Philip said, "If with all your heart you believe in Jesus, and if you accept Him as your personal Savior, surely you can be baptized." The man responded and said,

"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and I accept Him as my personal Savior."

38. So he ordered the driver to stop, and he and Philip waded down into the pool, and Philip baptized him.

39. When they came up out of the water, they gave each other a brotherly hug and said goodbye. Then the Holy Spirit caught up Philip and carried him away. And the man stepped into his chariot and went on his way happy in his new-found faith and never saw Philip again.

40. Philip suddenly found himself in Azontus, west of Jerusalem, on the coast of the Mediterranean. From there he went northward preaching the good news about Jesus Christ, traveling all along the coast until he came to Caesarea, where he settled down and raised a family.

CHAPTER 9

1. In the meanwhile, the young council member, called Saul, kept up his persecution of the believers wherever he found them.

2. One day he decided to ask the High Priest for permission to go as far north as Damascus in search of the Christians. All he said he needed were letters of authorization. He promised that if he found any of them worshiping in the synagogues there, he would arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem to stand trial, whether they were men or women.

3. The High Priest gave Saul the letters of authorization he asked for, and immediately Saul headed toward Damascus. After days of travel, he and his companions were glad to be in sight of the city, when suddenly an extremely bright light, aimed directly at Saul, beamed down from heaven.

4. He was so blinded that he fell to the ground. As he lay there he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

5. Saul trembled and said, "Sir, who are you?" The Lord answered, "I'm Jesus, the One you're persecuting. You've been fighting against the pricks of your own conscience ever since you saw Stephen stoned, and you've been taking your an-

ger out on me."

6. Saul, in a weak voice, said, "Lord, what do you want me to do now?" The Lord answered and said to him, "Get up and go on into Damascus. There you'll be told what to do next."

7. Now the men who were with Saul stood speechless. They saw the light, heard the voice, but didn't see anyone.

8. When Saul stood up and opened his eyes, he found that he was totally blind. His companions had to lead him by the hand the rest of the way into the city.

9. For the next three days, Saul just sat in his room, still blind, refusing to eat or drink, and in his mind going over the prophecies about the Messiah.

10. Now in this same city there was a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ named Ananias. And the Lord spoke to him in a night vision: "Ananias?" He answered and said, "Yes, Lord, I'm here."

11. The Lord said, "I want you to go to the house of Judas who lives on the street called Straight and ask to see a man from Tarsus called Saul. He's staying there and is fasting and praying, asking for help.

12. I've spoken to him in a vision and told him that a man named Ananias would be coming to see him and would restore his sight simply by placing his hands on his head."

13. Then Ananias answered and said, "Lord, this sounds like the man we've all heard about who's been going from house to house in Jerusalem looking for Christians, arresting them, and sending them to prison.

14. We've also heard that the High Priest has given him permission to come here to arrest us and to take us back to Jerusalem for trial."

15. But the Lord said to him, "Go and do as I've told you, because I've chosen him to serve me and to carry the good news of salvation to the Gentiles, even sharing it with princes and kings. He'll also be preaching it to the scattered Jews throughout the empire wherever he finds them.

16. And I will show him how much he will have to suffer for my sake."

17. So Ananias went to the house where

Saul was staying. When he met him, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus Christ, who met you on the way here, has sent me to heal you." Then he placed his hands on Saul's head and said, "Receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

18. Instantly, scale after scale seemed to peel off his eyes and suddenly he could see. Then he stood up and together they went out to a river and Ananias baptized him.

19. Later, back in his room, Saul, who was known also as Paul, decided to end his fast. After he had eaten something, he felt better and his strength began to return, and for the next several days he stayed with the believers there in Damascus.

20. One day he went to the nearest synagogue and started preaching, telling people that Jesus Christ was indeed the Son of God.

21. Everyone who heard him was amazed and said, "Isn't this the man who went from house to house in Jerusalem, arresting those who worship Jesus and even consenting that some of them be executed? Wasn't he sent here by the High Priest to do the same thing and to take those who worship Jesus back to Jerusalem for trial?"

22. But each day Paul preached more powerfully than the day before, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. And the Jews who argued with him could not disprove what he said.

23. Soon the news of Paul's preaching spread throughout the city. The Jews were so upset that they decided to kill him.

24. But he found out about their plot and that they had stationed some of their men at each of the city gates to kill him as soon as he came out.

25. One night, an angel from heaven told Paul to leave and to go out into the desert for awhile. So the believers took him to a hole in the city wall, put him in a large basket, for he was small, and with ropes they gently lowered him to the ground.

26. From Damascus Paul made his way to the desert as the Lord had directed him. After three years he came back and went to Jerusalem, wanting to make peace with

the believers there. But they were afraid of him, because they thought that he was sent to spy on them and that his conversion they had heard about wasn't real.

27. Finally, Barnabas befriended him, learned about his conversion, and then introduced him to the apostles. He explained to them what had happened to Paul on the way to Damascus, how the Lord appeared to him and spoke with him. He also told the apostles about Paul's days of fasting and prayer, his baptism at the hands of Ananias, and how he boldly preached Jesus Christ in the synagogue.

28. So they welcomed Paul and had him stay with them, and he went all over Jerusalem preaching the good news about Jesus Christ.

29. Everywhere he preached, he did so openly and boldly, telling the people that Jesus Christ was Lord. He also debated with the Greek-speaking Jews and the Freedmen that Stephen debated with, and it wasn't long before they laid plans to kill him. ACTS 1

30. When the believers heard this, they urged Paul to leave to save his life and chose some from among themselves to accompany him as far as Caesarea. When they got to Caesarea, he went on northward to his hometown of Tarsus.

31. So the churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace, and the believers encouraged each other in the faith and in the love of the Lord. Also, the Holy Spirit worked through them, and they were overjoyed as they saw scores of people being added to the church.

32. About this same time, Peter on his itinerary stopped to see the believers in Lydda.

33. He was introduced to a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had not been able to get out of bed for eight years.

34. When Peter met him, he said, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. So get up and get out of bed." Immediately the man sat up and got out of bed.

35. In a matter of hours, all the people in Lydda and the surrounding area of Sharon heard about it and were eager to see this man. And many of them gave their hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ.

36. Not far away in Joppa, one of the women believers, called Tabitha, which means “a deer”—in Greek she was called Dorcas—was always doing good and helping others, especially the poor.

37. It so happened that she became sick and a few days later died. The believers prepared her body for burial and laid it out in an upstairs room.

38. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the believers had heard that Peter was there. So they asked two men to hurry over to Lydda to urge Peter to come as fast as he could.

39. Peter immediately left with them for Joppa. On arrival, they took him upstairs to where Tabitha’s body was. The room was full of widows mourning her death. They showed Peter all the clothes Tabitha had made for them before she became sick and told him how much they needed her.

40. Then Peter asked all of them to leave the room and knelt down and earnestly prayed for her life to be restored. When he had finished, he stood up, turned toward the body, and said, “Tabitha, come, get up.” Instantly she opened her eyes, looked at Peter, and sat up.

41. He then reached out his hand and helped her to stand up. Then he called to the widows and the other believers in the house to come up and see what the Lord had done.

42. The news about this spread quickly throughout the city, and many believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

43. Peter stayed in Joppa and worked with the believers for quite some time. He stayed with a believer named Simon who earned his living by tanning leather.

CHAPTER 10

1. In the meanwhile, about thirty miles up the coast in Caesarea, was a man named Cornelius who was an officer in the section of the Roman army known as the Italian Regiment.

2. He was a very religious man and together with his family worshiped God and at every opportunity helped the poor and took time out to pray.

3. About three o’clock one afternoon

while he was having his devotions, Cornelius had a vision. An angel appeared to him and said, “Cornelius?”

4. He looked in the direction of the voice, saw the angel, and with a quivering voice asked, “Sir, what is it that you want?” The angel said, “God has heard your prayers and has noticed what you’ve been doing for the poor and has not forgotten your requests.

5. He wants you to send a messenger down the coast to Joppa to find a man whose name is Simon Peter to bring him here.

6. He’s staying with a leather tanner named Simon, whose house is located by the sea.”

7. Then the angel disappeared and the vision faded. Cornelius immediately called two of his servants and one of his soldier attendants, who was as devoutly religious as he was,

8. and told them what had happened. Then he asked them to saddle the horses and go to Joppa to find Peter.

9. About noon the next day, after riding all night, they could see Joppa in the distance. As they were approaching the city, Peter went up on the flat roof of the house where he was staying to have a little peace and quiet, and to find some time to pray.

10. While he was praying and waiting for dinner, he was given a vision.

11. In the vision he saw the sky open up and saw a huge sheet descending to earth held up by its four corners.

12. Inside this sheet were all kinds of unclean animals, snakes, and wild birds.

13. Then he heard a voice say, “Are you hungry, Peter? Then get up and kill and eat.”

14. Peter answered, “No, Lord! I’ve never eaten anything that is considered impure or unclean.”

15. Then the voice spoke again and said, “What God considers clean, is clean. Do not call it unclean.”

16. This happened three times, and then the sheet was pulled back to heaven.

17. While Peter was trying to figure out what this vision was all about, the three men whom Cornelius had sent found the

house of Simon the leather tanner and were knocking on his door.

18. When no one answered, they called out to see if anyone was home and if this was the place where Simon Peter was staying.

19. Peter was still on the roof trying to figure out the vision when the Holy Spirit spoke to him and said, "There are three men downstairs looking for you."

20. You need to go downstairs to see them. They will ask you to go with them. Don't hesitate, because I'm the One who sent them here to find you."

21. Peter went downstairs to meet these men whom Cornelius had sent. He introduced himself and said, "I'm Simon Peter. Are you looking for me?" They said, "Yes." Then Peter said, "Why?"

22. They answered, "Cornelius, captain of the Italian Regiment stationed in Caesarea, sent us here to find you. He's a good man. He worships God and is well thought of by the Jewish people. Yesterday an angel appeared to him in a vision and asked him to send for you. He wants you to come to his house so he can ask you questions and listen to what you have to tell him about the Lord."

23. Peter invited them in, and they stayed there overnight with Simon the tanner. Early the next morning, Peter and some others, chosen believers of Joppa, went with these three men and headed for Caesarea.

24. The day after they left, they arrived in Caesarea, and Cornelius was waiting for them with a house full of relatives and friends whom he had invited to come and to hear Peter.

25. Now when Peter came in the front gate, Cornelius went out to meet him, and when he was introduced to Peter, he fell on his knees as if to worship him.

26. Peter quickly reached down and pulled him up and said, "Stand up! I'm not a god, but a human being like you!"

27. So Cornelius stood up, and he and Peter started talking together as they walked on into the house. There Peter found a house full of people waiting for him.

28. After Peter was introduced to the

group, he said, "All of you know that a Jew is not allowed to stay overnight in the house of a Gentile, because that makes him ceremonially unclean. But God has shown me in vision that I have no right to look down on any man and call him unclean."

29. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. But what I would like to know is, why did you send for me?"

30. Cornelius said, "Four days ago, I had gone on a fast, and about three o'clock in the afternoon, while I was having my private devotions, suddenly a man in a bright, shining robe and with light shining all around him, stood directly in front of me and said,

31. "Cornelius, God has heard your prayers and has noticed what you've been doing for the poor and hasn't forgotten your requests.

32. Send someone to Joppa for a man called Simon Peter who is staying as a guest with Simon the leather tanner, whose house is by the sea."

33. I immediately sent for you and you've been kind enough to come. Therefore, we are all here in the sight of God to hear what the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

34. Then Peter said, "I now know that it is true that God treats everyone alike and doesn't respect one person more than another.

35. Anyone who respects Him and does what is right, He accepts as part of His people, no matter to what nationality or race he or she belongs.

36. I'm sure you've heard how the God of Israel has sent a message of goodwill and peace to all men through His Son Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of all.

37. Also, I'm sure you've heard about the great things He did during His ministry, beginning in Galilee when John the Baptist was preaching in Judea, and how from there His ministry spread throughout the land of Israel.

38. God poured out His Spirit on Jesus when He was still a boy growing up in Nazareth. As a man, He went everywhere doing good, healing the sick, and even casting out demons, because God's power was with Him.

39. Now we went with Him everywhere He went and saw everything He did throughout the whole land of Israel. In Jerusalem we saw the authorities arrest Him and then demand that He be crucified.

40. But on the third day after His crucifixion, God raised Him from the dead, and we spent forty days going everywhere with Him and doing so openly.

41. After His resurrection, He didn't mingle with the public as much as He did during His ministry, but He did eat and drink with us just as He had before, because God wanted us to be witnesses to the fact that He was alive.

42. Then Jesus ordered us to preach the good news of salvation to all people and to tell them that He is the One whom God has appointed Judge of the living and the dead.

43. Also all our prophets spoke of Him, telling us whoever believes in Him will receive the forgiveness of his sins."

44. While Peter was talking, the Holy Spirit came on all those sitting there listening to him.

45. The Jewish believers who were with Peter were amazed as they saw that God was giving the Holy Spirit to Gentiles.

46. They were especially amazed when they heard these people speaking in other languages and praising God for what He had done for them. Peter and those who were with him were surprised at what they saw. Finally, Peter said,

47. "How can we refuse to baptize these people when they're receiving the Holy Spirit, the same gift we received at Pentecost?"

48. Then he decided that all of them should be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And after the baptism, these new believers asked Peter to stay with them for awhile so they could learn more about Jesus, and Peter agreed.

CHAPTER 11

1. In the meantime, the apostles and believers in Judea had heard that Peter had taken the good news to the Gentiles and that they had also accepted the gospel.

2. When he came back to Jerusalem, those believers who thought that the Gentiles must first be circumcised and become Jews before they could become Christians criticized Peter and said,

3. "You mean to tell us that you stayed overnight in the house of those who aren't even circumcised and ate with those who are ceremonially unclean?"

4. Then Peter told them the story, beginning from the very first and said,

5. "While I was down in Joppa visiting our widows and other believers, one day at noon I went up on the flat roof of the house where I was staying to find a quiet place to pray, when suddenly I was in vision. I saw what looked like a huge sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners. It stopped right next to me.

6. When I looked inside the sheet, I saw all kinds of wild animals, snakes, and wild birds.

7. Then I heard a voice call to me and say, 'Come, Peter, kill and eat!'

8. But I said, 'Not I, Lord. I've never tasted anything that was ceremonially unclean, nor have I ever defiled myself by even handling it.'

9. Then the voice from heaven spoke to me again and said, 'Don't call unclean what God has said is clean.'

10. This happened three times in a row, and then the sheet and its contents were pulled back up to heaven.

11. At the same time, three men were downstairs by the gate asking for me, wanting me to go with them to Caesarea.

12. The Holy Spirit told me to go with them and not to ask any questions. So I went, taking six believers from Joppa with me. We finally arrived in Caesarea at the house of a man named Cornelius, who was the one who sent for me.

13. After we were introduced to him, he told us how an angel had appeared to him in vision while he was praying in his own house. The angel said to him, 'Send some of your servants to Joppa for a man named Simon Peter.

14. When he comes, he will answer your questions and tell you what you need to know to be saved.'

15. So I started telling them about the

Lord Jesus Christ, and in the middle of my presentation, the Holy Spirit came on them as He did on us at Pentecost.

16. When I saw what was happening, I remembered what the Lord had told us about John when he said, 'John is baptizing people with water, but you will see people baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

17. I decided that if God gave these Gentiles, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the same gift that He gave us when we believed, who was I to stop God?"

18. When that group of believers heard this, those who thought that the Gentiles must first be circumcised and become Jews before they could become Christians, they first remained silent, then they praised the Lord and said, "This means that God has also given the Gentiles a chance to repent and be saved!"

19. Now many believers had left Jerusalem to escape the persecution following the stoning of Stephen. Some went as far away as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, telling others the good news that Jesus was the Messiah, but they shared it with their fellow Jews only.

20. But there were some of them from Cyprus and Cyrene who didn't hesitate to share the good news about Jesus Christ with the Gentiles in Antioch.

21. The power of the Lord was with them, and large numbers of people turned to the Lord and believed.

22. Before long, the news of these large numbers of conversions reached the church leaders in Jerusalem, so they decided to send Barnabas to Antioch to see what was happening.

23. On arrival, Barnabas saw how the grace of God had transformed the people. He was jubilant, and encouraged them all to stay faithful to the Lord and to continue to love Him with all their hearts.

24. Barnabas was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. While he was in Antioch, many more accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and were added to the church.

25. Then Barnabas decided to go to Tarsus to find Paul and ask him to come help him.

26. Barnabas found Paul and brought

him back to Antioch. For a whole year, the two of them worked with the believers, teaching them and adding more converts to the church. In fact, it was here in Antioch that the believers were first called Christians.

27. About this time, some believers from Jerusalem who had the gift of prophecy came to visit Antioch.

28. One of them called Agabus stood up in a meeting one day, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, predicted that there would be a severe drought throughout the Roman world and that the believers should prepare for it. And in the days of the Emperor Claudius the drought came.

29. Then the believers in Antioch decided to help their fellow believers in Judea.

30. After they collected the relief funds, they gave them to Barnabas and Paul and asked them to take the funds to the church in Jerusalem for distribution.

CHAPTER 12

1. About this same time, Herod Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the Great, began to persecute the church by arresting some of the members.

2. He had James, the brother of John, arrested, and then had him beheaded as Herod Antipas had done to John the Baptist.

3. When he saw how this sort of thing pleased the Jews, he decided to arrest Peter. This happened during the spring festival of the Passover Feast.

4. When he had arrested Peter, he put him in the Tower of Antonia and ordered four groups of four soldiers each to guard him. Now Herod decided not to behead Peter as quietly as he had James, but to make a public show of his execution. However, he thought it was best to wait until after the Passover Feast.

5. While Peter was in prison, the believers pleaded with God day and night for his release.

6. The night before Herod was to put Peter on trial, Peter was sleeping soundly in his jail cell, chained to two personal guards with two other guards standing just outside his cell door.

7. Suddenly an angel of the Lord stood

in Peter's cell and by his presence lit up the whole area. He took Peter by the shoulder, shook him, and said, "Wake up, Peter. Hurry, get dressed." Peter woke up, and as soon as he struggled to his feet, the chains binding his wrists and ankles fell off. And all this happened while the guards stood there motionless.

8. Peter was only half awake as he tried to get dressed. The angel had to help him by telling him, "Don't forget to buckle your belt and to put on your sandals." Peter did as he was told and then the angel said, "Now wrap your outer robe around you and follow me."

9. Then the cell door opened noiselessly, the angel went out, and Peter followed him. During all of this, Peter wasn't sure whether this was real or whether it was a dream. He decided that because of the angel, it must be a dream, or maybe he was having a vision.

10. They passed between his personal guards and then the main set of guards by the big iron gate at the entrance to the tower. When the angel and Peter approached the big gate, it also opened noiselessly just as the small cell gate had done, and they walked on outside. As they made their way down one of the side streets, suddenly the angel disappeared.

11. Then Peter came to himself as if he just woke up. He could feel the chill night air and said to himself, "This wasn't a vision! This is real! The Lord sent His angel to deliver me from Herod and from tomorrow's execution!"

12. He stood there for a moment, and then decided to go to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, because he knew that people would be there praying for him.

13. He went and knocked on the courtyard door. A servant girl named Rhoda came out to answer.

14. But when she saw that it was Peter, she got so excited that she forgot to unlock the door and ran back inside to tell everyone the good news, leaving Peter standing outside.

15. When she was asked who knocked, she told them it was Peter. They said to her, "Girl, you must be out of your mind.

Peter's in jail." But she insisted, so they said to each other, "She probably saw his angel."

16. In the meantime, Peter continued quietly knocking on the courtyard door. Finally, some of them came to see who would be knocking at this hour of the night. When they opened the door, they were stunned because it was Peter.

17. He put his finger to his lips, motioning for them to be quiet. They let him in, and once inside, he told them the whole story of how the Lord had sent an angel to get him out of prison. When he finished, he said, "Go tell James, the Lord's stepbrother, and the other believers what happened." Then he quickly said goodbye and left the city.

18. As soon as it was daylight, the officers of the guard went to the prison to get Peter. When they got there, the soldiers were still standing at the door of the prison, and the long chains were still fastened to the wrists of the other soldiers guarding Peter, but none of them realized that the prisoner was no longer under his blanket, but was gone. Not finding him, the officers and the guards became terrified.

19. When the officers took word back to Herod Agrippa, he caused a search to be made, and when Peter still couldn't be found, Herod cross-examined Peter's personal guards and then ordered them be executed, even though he knew they were innocent. Then he left Jerusalem and went up to Caesarea.

20. Now Herod had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and one day he threatened to punish them for their disobedience. So they befriended Blastus, the king's personal secretary, and arranged for an appointment to see the king. When they were ushered into his presence, they pleaded with him not to cut off their food supply or shipping trade. He agreed, and they made peace.

21. Soon afterward, Herod decided to have a great festival. And for the occasion, he put on a royal robe woven with strands of gold and silver which made it glisten and sparkle. Then he took his seat on the throne and gave a tremendous oration.

22. When he had finished, the audience

shouted, "This is the voice of a god and not the voice of a man!"

23. At that moment, the same angel who had been sent from the heavenly courts to release Peter, touched Herod, and instantly he was in agony. With excruciating pain, he left the festive hall knowing he was stricken with death. Guilt seized him and he remembered his relentless persecution of the followers of Christ and his unreasoned vengeance on the prison guards. The festivities ended, and a few days later Herod died, his intestines having been eaten by worms.

24. In the meanwhile, the word of God was spreading everywhere and the church continued to grow.

25. **Now** after Paul and Barnabas finished their mission and took the donations of the believers in Antioch down to Jerusalem, they went back to Antioch and took John Mark with them.

CHAPTER 13

1. In the church at Antioch were some believers who had the gift of proclamation and others who had the gift of teaching. These were: Barnabas; Simeon, whom they called Niger; Lucius, who was originally from Cyrene; Manaen, who as a boy had grown up with Herod Agrippa; and of course, Paul.

2. One day while they were worshipping the Lord after they had fasted and prayed, the Holy Spirit spoke and said to them, "I want you to set aside Paul and Barnabas for mission service, because I want them to do the work that I've called them to do."

3. Then after another period of fasting and praying, they ordained Paul and Barnabas as their representatives and sent them on their first missionary journey.

4. And the Holy Spirit was with them and told them where to go. First, Paul and Barnabas went down to Seleucia on the coast, and from there took a ship to the island of Cyprus.

5. When they arrived at the port city of Salamis, they and John Mark, who was with them, visited all the synagogues in the city and preached the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ.

6. Eventually they left Salamis on foot and made their way across the island to the city of Paphos. While there, they came upon a well-educated Jew called Bar-Jesus, who practiced magic and claimed to be a prophet.

7. This man was in the service of Sergius Paulus, the island's governor, who had a reputation for being both reasonable and intelligent. Paul and Barnabas hadn't been in the city very long before they were invited to the governor's palace to share with him the word of God.

8. But Bar-Jesus, who was also called Elymas, tried to turn the governor away from the Christian faith by accusing Paul of having used trickery to perform his miracles.

9. Then Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, turned to Elymas and said,

10. "You are really a son of the devil, aren't you? You seem to be against everything that is good. With your so-called magic and witchcraft you turn people away from the truth about our God. When will you stop perverting the ways of the Lord?"

11. The Lord has finally decided to step in and stop you. From this moment on and for the next few days until the Lord decides to restore your sight, you will be totally blind." Instantly a heavy mist settled over his eyes, and he found himself in total darkness, and someone came and led him out of the room.

12. When the governor saw what had happened, he was amazed and no longer doubted the truth of what Paul taught. With all his heart he accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and became a Christian.

13. From Paphos, Paul and his companions took a ship to Asia Minor and from the port of entry walked the next eight miles to Perga, the capital of the province of Pamphylia. Here John Mark decided that he had had all the missionary work he could take and went back home to Jerusalem.

14. From Perga, Paul and Barnabas went on to Antioch, one of the major cities in the region called Pisidia. The next Sabbath they attended the synagogue and sat in the congregation with all the other worshipers.

15. After the Scripture reading from the books of Moses and some of the other prophets, the elders of the church sent a note to Paul and Barnabas which read, "We see that you men are fellow Israelites, so if you have a word of encouragement for us, come up and speak."

16. Paul went up front and motioned with his hand for everyone to be quiet and said, "Men of Israel and all of you here who worship our God, listen to me.

17. Our God, the God of Israel, chose us to be His people and made us into a nation after He delivered us from slavery in Egypt. He did this with such power that even Egypt had to acknowledge His sovereignty.

18. Then, for the next forty years, He took care of us and fed us as would a compassionate father with great patience and necessary discipline as we made our way through the wilderness.

19. After He dislodged seven tiny kingdoms within Palestine, He turned the land over to us and divided it according to our tribes.

20. Now, our people had been slaves in Egypt for about four hundred fifty years. But now we were governed by a court system, and we elected area judges until Samuel the prophet came along.

21. When the people asked for a king to be their leader so they could be like the other nations around them, God reluctantly consented and chose Saul, the son of Kish, from the tribe of Benjamin. Saul was the kind of man the people wanted. And he ruled the country for about forty years.

22. However, God had to remove Saul because of his disobedience. So He permitted him to be killed in battle. In his place, he chose David to be king and said, "I have chosen David, the son of Jesse, from the tribe of Judah, because he's a man after my own heart, a man who will do what I ask him to do."

23. It was from this man's descendants that God brought to Israel a Savior named Jesus, as He had promised.

24. Now before Jesus came, John the Baptist preached in Israel and told the people to repent and invited them to be baptized. That was when Jesus of Naza-

reth, a descendant of David from the tribe of Judah, began His ministry.

25. When it looked as if John was about to finish his mission, the people finally asked him who he was. He said, 'Don't think that I'm the One you've been looking for; I'm not. He's still to come. In fact I'm not even worthy to untie His shoes.'

26. Listen to me, men and brothers, those of you who are Israelites and descendants of Abraham and those of you who worship God. The message of salvation sent to us by God through Jesus of Nazareth is for all of you, as well as for us in Palestine.

27. However, all the people in Jerusalem and their leaders, except for a few, did not accept the fact that Jesus was the One whom David had talked about. They didn't understand the words of the prophets, even though they had heard them read every Sabbath in their synagogues. Yet, in spite of themselves, they helped fulfill the prophecies by arresting Jesus and condemning Him to death.

28. And even though they could find no real reason to do so, they still brought Him to Pilate, who was the Roman governor, and asked him to have Him crucified!

29. So He was put to death just as the prophets had said He would be. Then they took His body down from the Roman cross on which He had been nailed, and laid it in a tomb.

30. But three days later, God raised Him from the dead!

31. For the next forty days He walked this earth, fellowshiping with the men from Galilee who had come with Him to Jerusalem. And these men are living witnesses of what God has done.

32. This is the good news we want to share with you. We have come to tell you that the promise God made to our forefathers has now been fulfilled.

33. Yes, God kept the promise He made with Abraham and with his descendants when He resurrected Jesus Christ. This is what David said that God would do. God had spoken through him and had said of Jesus: 'You are now my Son in a new way, because this day I raised you up from the dead.'

34. In fact, God raised Jesus from the dead before His body decayed, just as David prophesied. God, speaking through him, told us that He said to His Son, 'I will give you the blessings I promised David.'

35. In another place David spoke about God and said, 'I know that you will not let the body of your Holy One rot away in the grave.'

36. Now David, after he had served the people in his generation and had fulfilled God's purpose for his life, died just as his ancestors had died, and his body rotted away in the grave.

37. But not so with Jesus! God resurrected Him and His body did not see decay.

38. I want all of you men and brothers to know that through Jesus Christ the power of death has been broken, and the forgiveness of sin is proclaimed everywhere.

39. Because of what Jesus did for us, all who believe, that God's promise has been fulfilled in Him can be put right with God, which the law of Moses could not do.

40. So now let's be careful that the other things the prophets have said about us will not happen.

41. God warned us about this when He spoke through the prophet Habakkuk and said, 'Look out, you who have an unbelieving heart, lest you disbelieve and die in your sins. I'm going to do something in your day that will surprise you, and you will see a thing you would never believe even if someone told you he had seen it.'

42. Then Paul sat down, the congregation was dismissed, and as the people went out, they begged Paul to come back the next Sabbath and preach to them again.

43. Paul and Barnabas left the synagogue, and some of the Jews, and a number of those Gentiles who had been converted to Judaism, followed them. Paul and Barnabas spoke to them and encouraged them to believe what God had done for them through Jesus Christ.

44. The next Sabbath, it seemed as though everyone in town came out to hear these two men preach the word of God and explain to them the Scriptures.

45. But when the Jewish leaders saw the huge crowds, they became jealous and

started to talk against what Paul was saying, even contradicting and insulting him publicly.

46. That was when Paul and Barnabas spoke up, saying to the Jewish leaders, "It was right and proper for us to bring the good news of salvation to you first, but if you don't believe what we're telling you, you have judged yourselves as unworthy of eternal life, and we feel justified in turning to the Gentiles.

47. For this is what the Lord told me to do when He said, 'I'm sending you as a light to the Gentiles to take the good news of salvation to them, so they, too, can be saved.'"

48. When the Gentile converts heard this, they were glad and praised God for the message of salvation. And when the message of salvation was shared with other Gentiles, and they realized that they too could have eternal life, they, also believed.

49. And the word of the Lord spread among the Gentile population throughout that whole region.

50. But the Jewish leaders didn't give up. They continued to oppose Paul and persuaded the Gentile women of high social standing, who showed an interest in Judaism, to speak to their influential husbands, telling them that Paul and Barnabas ought to be stopped. And that's exactly what happened; the city officials forced Paul and Barnabas to leave town.

51. In protest, Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet and went on to Iconium.

52. But they left behind in Antioch new believers who were full of joy and filled with the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 14

1. Much the same happened in Iconium. Paul and Barnabas attended one of the synagogues and shared the truth about Jesus Christ with the members. They shared the good news in such an appealing way that a large number of Jews and Greek converts to Judaism responded and became believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. But there were some Jews who would not believe. They stirred up the community and turned the people against

these new converts.

3. But Paul and Barnabas stayed on for quite some time boldly preaching that Jesus Christ, was Lord, and the Lord bore witness to their preaching by granting them power to heal the sick and to do many signs and wonders.

4. Soon the people of the city were divided, some supporting the Jews and others supporting the apostles.

5. Then the Jews and the Greeks who opposed the apostles persuaded the city officials to have Paul and Barnabas arrested, after which they publicly demanded that Paul and Barnabas be stoned to death.

6. As soon as Paul and Barnabas heard that the city officials were planning to arrest them, they quickly left town and went on to Lystra and Derbe in the region of Lycaonia,

7. where they continued to preach God's good news.

8. Now in Lystra there was a man who had been born with deformed feet and was unable to walk.

9. In one of the meetings, he sat looking at Paul and was listening intently to everything Paul had to say. Paul sensed that this man believed he could be healed.

10. So he focused his eyes on the man and in a commanding voice said, "Stand up! Get up on your feet!" The man jumped up on his feet and then walked up and down the aisle praising God.

11. When the people saw this, they starting chanting in their Lycaonian dialect, saying, "These men belong to the family of gods and have come down in human form to visit and honor our city!"

12. They thought that Barnabas was the father of the gods because he looked so venerable; so they called him Zeus. They thought Paul was the spokesman for the gods, and so they called him Hermes.

13. Unknown to Paul and Barnabas, the chief priest in charge of the temple of Zeus, located just outside the city, had brought in young bulls and loads of flowers to the gate of the house where the apostles were staying. He and the people planned to sacrifice these animals to Paul and Barnabas as soon as they came through the gate.

14. When Paul and Barnabas saw what

was going on and heard what the people were planning to do, they ran out of the house, tore their robes in half and waded into the crowd shouting,

15. "Don't do this! Stop! Listen to us!" When Paul got their attention, he said, "We are just human beings like you. We've come to bring you the good news that you should turn from worshiping useless idols and worship the real God, the One who created the heavens and the earth and everything in them.

16. In the past, He allowed people to walk in their own ways,

17. Yet He never left Himself without some evidence of His existence, by sending you rain when you needed it, by giving you good harvests, and by satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

18. Paul and Barnabas spoke earnestly to the people as they tried to stop them from offering sacrifices to them, and even with these words, they barely succeeded in stopping them.

19. Meanwhile, some of the Jews from Antioch in Pisidia and from Iconium where Paul and Barnabas had just been, had followed them to Lystra. When they heard what had happened, and how the people in Lystra nearly worshiped Paul, they warned them not to listen to him for he might deceive them again or even bewitch them. Then the people turned on Paul, took hold of him and dragged him through the streets, out of the city, where they stoned him until they thought he was dead.

20. After it was all over, and the crowd broke up and left, a few believers stayed by to take care of Paul's body. As they stood there and cried, suddenly Paul moved! Then he got up and slowly walked back into the city with them. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

21. Again they preached God's good news, and many people accepted the Lord and became believers. Then they made their way back to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia where they had been before.

22. They visited the believers and encouraged them to remain true to their newly found faith. Also, they told them that they would have to expect to be mis-

understood and mistreated like their Savior was.

23. Out of each group, they ordained elders, and after fasting and praying together, they committed the believers to the Lord, and told them to put their complete trust in God.

24. Then Paul and Barnabas made their way on through the region of Pisidia and into the region of Pamphylia.

25. There they stopped and preached to the people in the city of Perga, and then went on and preached the good news to the people in Attalia.

26. From Attalia they boarded a ship and sailed back to Antioch in Syria, where they had been commissioned as missionaries and given over to the care of God as they went forth to work for Him.

27. When they arrived home, they called all the believers together and told them everything that God had done and how He had opened the way for the Gentiles to hear and to believe.

28. And they stayed with the believers in Antioch quite some time to rest and recuperate.

CHAPTER 15

1. **Now**, some men had come to Antioch from Jerusalem and had started to teach the new believers that they were not really Christians and could not be saved unless they became Jews first and were circumcised according to the law of Moses.

2. Paul and Barnabas confronted these men, and soon the discussions became so serious that believers began to polarize. So the church decided that Paul and Barnabas, together with some of the local elders, should go to Jerusalem to ask the apostles to settle the matter.

3. So, with the blessing of the church, they left Antioch and made their way through Phoenicia and Samaria, sharing with the believers along the way how the Gentiles had accepted the message and how it had changed their lives. This news greatly cheered and encouraged the believers.

4. Now when Paul and his company got to Jerusalem, the believers there welcomed them, as did the elders and the

apostles. Then the believers called a special meeting during which Paul and Barnabas shared with them all the things that God had done through them on their first missionary journey.

5. But some of the Jewish believers, who in their hearts were still Pharisees, stood up and insisted, as had those who went to Antioch, that there was no way that the Gentiles could be saved unless they first became Jews, were circumcised, and kept the laws of Moses.

6. So the apostles set aside a time when they and the leading elders would meet in a general assembly to decide the issue.

7. After a long discussion about what the Gentiles should or should not do, Peter stood up and said, "Brothers, you remember how God used me about ten years ago to take the gospel to Cornelius, who was a Gentile, so he could learn more about Jesus Christ and become a believer?"

8. And you remember how God, who knows everyone's heart, verified the rightness of the act by filling their hearts with the Holy Spirit as he did ours at Pentecost?

9. Well, apparently it made no difference to God who they were. He accepted them as clean people because they believed and put their confidence in Him.

10. Now why do you want to question the sincerity of these new believers in Antioch? Is it because you doubt that God has really accepted them? Why do you want to load them down with unnecessary requirements which even our own Jewish believers have a hard time bearing up under?

11. We already know that we are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And they are saved the same way."

12. After Peter finished, no one in the whole group had anything more to say. So they quietly sat and listened to what Paul and Barnabas had to say as they told about the miraculous healings and the other marvelous works which God had done through them for the Gentiles.

13. When they finished, James, the step-brother of Jesus, who was chairing the meeting, stood up and said, "Brothers, listen to me.

14. Peter just reminded us that about

ten years ago God counted the believing Gentiles as part of His people.

15. This is in harmony with what the prophets made clear when they spoke for God and said,

16. 'In that day I will restore the kingdom of David. I will clean up the ruins of the city and rebuild the walls and make them strong again.

17. People everywhere who long to know me will come and be accepted, and I will call them by my name because they also belong to me.'

18. And the Lord made these things known to us long ago.

19. Therefore, it seems to me that we should not burden the Gentiles with these older rituals just because they are turning to God.

20. But we should write them a letter asking them not to identify with idol worship by eating things sacrificed to idols, not to participate in the sexual lifestyle of the world, and finally, not to eat anything strangled, with the blood still in the meat.

21. And on the positive side we should ask them to familiarize themselves with the laws of health and the moral standards given to us in the writings of Moses, which we read a portion of every Sabbath in the synagogue."

22. James' statement pleased the apostles and the leading elders, so together with representatives from the church in Jerusalem, they agreed and decided to chose two men from among themselves to go with Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch to deliver the letter. The two men they chose were Judas, also called Barsabbas, and Silas.

23. The letter they sent with Judas and Silas read as follows: "We the apostles and elders, who are your brothers in Christ, send our greetings to all our Gentile brothers and sisters, not only in the city of Antioch, but also in the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

24. Since we've heard that some of our members from here have troubled you with the idea that you must first become children of Abraham by being circumcised and then keep all the laws of Moses before you can become Christians and be saved, we

want you to know that they were not sent to you by us.

25. So we decided to get together in a general assembly and agreed that it would be helpful to let you know how we feel about this and to send two official representatives from here to go with Paul and Barnabas to deliver this letter.

26. We recognize that Paul and Barnabas are reliable and trustworthy men who have risked their lives for the Lord Jesus Christ.

27. The other men are Judas, also called Barsabbas, and Silas, and they will verify that what we have said in the letter is true.

28. We want you to know that we freely and willingly agree with the actions of the Holy Spirit and have decided not to put any burden on you, except for the following rules, in order to promote greater fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

29. First, don't identify with idol worship by eating things connected with idol worship. Secondly, don't eat anything strangled, that is, with blood still in it. And thirdly, don't live the sexual lifestyle that the world does. Now if you do this much, you'll be doing fine. Best wishes from us to you."

30. So the men were sent with the letter to Antioch. When they got there, they called a special meeting and presented the letter to the leaders.

31. And after the elders read it to the people, they all rejoiced over the words of acceptance and encouragement.

32. Then Judas and Silas, who both had the gift of proclamation, spoke to the people, encouraging them in the word of the Lord.

33. After spending some time in Antioch encouraging the members, they were asked by the believers to take a message of peace back to the apostles in Jerusalem.

34. Judas agreed to go, but Silas decided to stay.

35. Then Paul and Barnabas, together with many others, went throughout the city teaching and preaching the word of the Lord.

36. **Sometime** later, Paul said to Barnabas, "We should go visit our brothers in

the cities we visited on our first missionary journey to see how they're doing."

37. Barnabas agreed and decided to take John Mark along, who was a relative of his.

38. But Paul didn't think that was such a good idea, because John Mark had not stayed out with them, but had decided to leave and go back home after they had reached Pamphylia.

39. Such a strong difference of opinion arose between them over the potential of John Mark that they separated. So Barnabas decided to take Mark and sail west to the island of Cyprus to visit the believers there.

40. And Paul decided to take Silas and go by foot and visit the believers to the north. Then the church members in Antioch placed all of them in the care of God, and they departed.

41. As Paul walked through the northern regions of Syria and on into Cilicia, he confirmed the believers in the faith wherever he went.

CHAPTER 16

1. After Paul and Silas visited the believers in Derbe, they went on from there to Lystra. It was in Lystra that they met a young man named Timothy, whose mother was Jewish and his father Greek.

2. And all they heard from the believers in Lystra and Iconium about young Timothy was good.

3. So Paul decided to take Timothy with him, but not before he was circumcised. Paul did this, not because he believed that this was necessary for the young man's salvation, but because all the Jews in the region knew that Timothy's father was Greek, and Paul wanted them to accept him as a fellow Jew.

4. From Lystra they went on their way visiting the believers in the various cities where Paul had been before and sharing with them the three rules of conduct that the apostles and elders had agreed on in the general meeting in Jerusalem.

5. So the members in these regions were encouraged and strengthened in the faith, and every day new believers were added to the churches.

6. Now after they had gone through the region of Phrygia, they headed north and went into the area of Galatia where they hadn't been before, but the Holy Spirit would not let them preach there.

7. So they continued on in a westerly direction, heading for the coastal region of Mysia. On their way, they thought of making a loop into Bithynia, but again the Holy Spirit would not allow them to preach there.

8. Then they decided to head directly west until they got to the port city of Troas, located on the coast of Asia Minor just across from Europe.

9. Their first night there, Paul had a vision in which he saw a man from Greece standing on the other shore trying to get his attention. The man called to him again, and again saying, "Please come over and help us!"

10. It was at this point that I joined the group and the next morning, Paul told us his vision and as soon as we could, we got ready to cross over into Europe. There was no doubt in our minds that the Holy Spirit wanted us to share the good news of salvation with the people in Greece.

11. We boarded a ship which was leaving Troas and took a straight course to the island of Samothracia, and from there on to the port city of Neapolis.

12. When we got there, we disembarked and made our way inland to Philippi, one of the more important cities in that area, and also a garrison town for the Roman army. When we arrived in the town, we were convicted that we should stay there for a few days.

13. On the Sabbath, we made our way out of the city to a place by the river where we were told that the Jews met for prayer, because there was no synagogue in the city. When we arrived, we found a group of women already present and sat down and joined them.

14. One of the women who came to worship God was Lydia from the city of Thyatira in Asia Minor. She was a merchant woman, trading in expensive purple cloth and one who feared God. We soon could tell that her heart was open to the gospel as she listened to Paul sharing the

good news of salvation with her.

15. Soon afterward, she and her family and others in her house decided to be baptized. She also invited us to come to stay with her and said, "If you have really accepted me as a believer in God, then you won't hesitate to stay at my house." So we went and stayed at her house.

16. One day while we were going through the city to the place of prayer by the river, a slave girl met us, who had an evil spirit and who chanted and cried out like the pagan priestesses do at Delphi who claim to predict the future. She was making much money for her owners by her fortune telling, and she began to follow us.

17. Everywhere we went, she shouted, "These men are servants of the most high god who are showing you the way to be saved!"

18. She did this day after day for weeks, until Paul was quite disturbed, because he was being thought of as a servant of one of the pagan gods instead of as a servant of the God of heaven. Finally he decided that he had to do something about it. So one day as this girl was following us and shouting about salvation, Paul turned around and said to the demon controlling her, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her and leave her alone!" Instantly the demon in her left, and the girl stopped shouting and was free of the demons.

19. When her owners saw what had happened to her, they realized that their chances of making money were gone. They grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them to the town square to face the city officials.

20. There they accused them to the Roman magistrates, saying, "These men are Jews and are causing all kinds of trouble in our city.

21. They're forcing people to accept the Jewish religion, which we as Roman citizens are forbidden by law to accept or practice."

22. Soon a crowd gathered, and when they heard the accusations against Paul and Silas, they joined in accusing them. Then the magistrates ordered Paul and Silas to be stripped to the waist and to be beaten with rods, right there in the public

square.

23. After they were beaten, the magistrates ordered them thrown in prison, and told the warden to watch them carefully, intending to let them go in the morning.

24. Determined to do a good job, the warden did more than he was asked to do and ordered the guards to take Paul and Silas down to the maximum security block and to put their feet in chains.

25. Now that night Paul and Silas praised the Lord that they were found worthy to suffer for Him as He had done for them. They prayed and sang and shared the good news of salvation with the rest of the prisoners.

26. Suddenly at midnight they heard a muffled sound in the distance, and then the earth began to shake as a violent earthquake hit the town. The whole prison shook, the cell doors flew open, and the chains on the prisoners fell off.

27. The warden woke up, saw all the prison doors open, and thought for sure that all the prisoners had escaped. So he pulled out his sword and decided to kill himself instead of being publicly executed for failing to do his job.

28. When Paul heard him draw his sword, he shouted, "Don't kill yourself! We're still here! No one's escaped!"

29. The warden couldn't believe his ears. He called for a torch, rushed into the security block, and stood there shaking as he realized that all the prisoners were still there. Then he fell on his knees in front of Paul and Silas, who were now free of their bonds, and begged them to come upstairs to his apartment.

30. As he led them out of the security block, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

31. They answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, and so will your household."

32. Then they shared the story of Jesus with the warden and his family and with all those living with him.

33. While Paul and Silas were talking to them about Jesus, the warden washed their wounds, and he and his family decided to be baptized.

34. Not only had the warden taken them

upstairs to his apartment to wash their wounds, but he had also fed them. And now Paul and Silas rejoiced that the warden and all his household believed, and they baptized them in the prison pool. When morning came, the warden returned Paul and Silas to the security block.

35. Later that same morning, the magistrates sent a couple of police officers to the prison with an order for the warden to let Paul and Silas go as they had originally planned to do.

36. The warden, with the police officers, went downstairs to the maximum security block where Paul and Silas were rechained to the wall and told them the good news, saying, "These officers have come with the order from the magistrates to release you. This means I can let you go free! And you can go in peace!"

37. But Paul spoke up and said to the officers, "The magistrates had us publicly beaten with rods, ordered us jailed without a trial even though we're Roman citizens, and now they want us to leave town quietly as if nothing happened? No! Let the magistrates come and officially release us so that people will know that we're innocent. Then we'll go."

38. The officers took the message back to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were afraid because of what they had done.

39. So the magistrates decided to go to the prison and personally apologize to Paul and Silas, and then ordered the warden to release them. Then they asked them to quietly leave the city.

40. Paul and Silas accepted their apology and thanked them for personally coming to release them. Then they left the prison and made their way back to Lydia's house, where they stayed awhile to encourage the new believers in their faith. After this, they left the city quietly as requested.

CHAPTER 17

1. From Philippi, Paul and Silas traveled in a southwesterly direction, passing through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia, and then finally heading west

and stopping in Thessalonica because there was a synagogue there.

2. Following his usual practice, Paul decided to attend the synagogue, and for the next three Sabbaths discussed with the people the meaning of the prophecies about the Messiah.

3. He showed them from the Scriptures that in order for the Messiah to fulfill the prophecies, He had to come and suffer and die and be raised from the dead. Then Paul concluded by saying, "This Jesus I am telling you about is the Messiah."

4. Many of the people were convinced and believed, including some very influential women and a large number of Greek men who were converts to Judaism. These all accepted the teaching of Paul and Silas and joyously followed them.

5. But the Jews who didn't believe became jealous over losing so many of their recent converts and became angry with Paul and Silas. They gathered some worthless fellows off the street and with their help formed a mob, and soon the whole town was in an uproar. They even broke into the house of a Jewish man called Jason, who lived near the synagogue, looking for Paul and Silas.

6. When they didn't find them, they grabbed Jason and a couple of other believers and dragged them out of the house to see the city officials. At the courthouse they started shouting, "These people are causing trouble! They cause trouble everywhere they go! And now they've come here!"

7. When the magistrates came out to see what the trouble was, the mob leaders said, "This man Jason is harboring fellows who are breaking the laws of Caesar. They are telling everyone about another ruler who is supposed to be a Jew named Jesus."

8. With these charges, the mob had the magistrates and the whole city concerned about what was going on.

9. The magistrates considered the case and agreed to charge Jason and those in his house with misbehavior and with disturbing the peace. After Jason and the others paid the required fine, the authorities let them go.

10. That night the believers asked Paul and Silas to leave town for the sake of their own safety. They agreed and left before daylight, heading south to Berea. When they arrived there, they attended the synagogue as they had in other places.

11. As a group, these people were more open-minded than the Jews in Thessalonica. They eagerly listened to what Paul and Silas had to say and every day studied the Scriptures for themselves to see if what these men were saying was correct.

12. As a result, many of them believed, including many Greek women of high social standing and a number of Greek men, all of whom worshiped the God of heaven.

13. But when the unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica heard that Paul and Silas were preaching in Berea, they came to start a riot there just as they had done at home.

14. When the Berean believers heard about this, they asked Paul to quickly leave, hoping to prevent a riot like the one in Thessalonica. He agreed, so they chose some men to go with him while Silas and Timothy stayed behind.

15. When Paul and his companions reached the coast, they boarded a ship going south to Athens. After they arrived there, the Berean believers who had accompanied Paul decided to stay for awhile. But before long, Paul sent the Berean believers back home with the message that Silas and Timothy should come to Athens as quickly as possible.

16. While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy to come, he became very disturbed by what he saw. Everywhere there were statues to all kinds of gods.

17. He decided to attend the synagogue, and started discussions with the Jews and the converted Greeks who worshiped there, and also in the public square with anyone who would listen.

18. One day he chose a place where the Epicureans and Stoics usually met to carry on their philosophical discussions. After they had listened to him for awhile, some said, "What is this fellow babbling about?" Others said, "What is he trying to do, tell us about a new god?" They asked these questions because Paul was preaching

about Jesus and how He was raised from the dead, which to these Athenians sounded very intriguing.

19. So they took Paul and brought him to a group of scholars at the Areopagus just outside the city, near the hill dedicated to the god Mars. Then they said to Paul, "Now tell all of us more about this new teaching."

20. Some of the things you were talking about in town sounded strange. We would like to know more about what these things mean."

21. This attitude was quite characteristic of the whole city, including students from other nations who had come there to study. They liked to spend all their time either telling or listening to the latest idea.

22. Paul stood on Mars Hill and spoke to the scholars of the city and said, "Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious."

23. I know this, because as I walked through your city, I found numerous statues and altars dedicated to many different gods. In fact, I saw written on one altar: Dedicated to the Unknown God. Now I want to tell you about this unknown God.

24. This God whom you so blindly worship is the One who made the whole universe and everything that's in it. He made the world and everything you see. And since He is the Lord of heaven and earth, He doesn't need a temple made by man.

25. He doesn't need any of the things people usually bring to gods when they come to worship, because He is a God who gives, not a God who needs. He is the One who gives life and breath and everything to all men.

26. In the beginning, He created just one male, which makes all men brothers. And when the descendants of this man multiplied, He scattered them over the face of the whole earth and determined ahead of time where the different ones should live.

27. He did all of this because He wants men everywhere to search for Him with all their hearts, and if they do so, they will find Him, because He is not very far away from any of us.

28. This is the same thing your poets

made reference to when they said, 'In Him we live and move and have our existence, which makes us His children.'

29. Therefore, if we are God's children, we shouldn't think that we can chisel or carve a representation of God according to our own ideas, no matter how overlaid with silver or gold the statue is.

30. It's time to begin to think differently. God has overlooked the past and has attributed this sort of thing to ignorance and misinformation. But now He expects people to change their thinking and to act more maturely.

31. The reason for this is that He has fixed a day in time when He will judge everyone by His laws. And the Judge will be a Man of His own choosing, One whom He has already raised from the dead."

32. When Paul came to this point in his speech and started talking about a someone who was raised from the dead, the scholars interrupted Paul and questioned the rationality of all of this. Others even made fun of him and said, "We'll listen to you about this sort of thing some other time."

33. So the meeting broke up and Paul went back to the city.

34. However, some did follow Paul, and when they heard more about Jesus, they believed. One of them was Dionysius, one of the scholars, and also a woman called Damaris, plus a few others.

CHAPTER 18

1. **Soon** afterward, Paul left Athens and traveled overland in a westerly direction until he came to Corinth.

2. There he met a Jew named Aquila, who was born in the northern section of Asia Minor called Pontus. Aquila and his wife Priscilla had been living in Italy, but had recently moved to Corinth to open a tent-making business because the Emperor Claudius had ordered all Jews to get out of Rome.

3. Since Paul had been trained as a tent-maker when he was a young man, he asked Aquila for a job so that he could support himself. Aquila and Priscilla not only hired him, but invited him to stay with them.

4. Every Sabbath they attended the local synagogue, where Paul talked with the Jews and with the Greeks who were worshiping there.

5. It was about this time that Silas and Timothy finally arrived from Thessalonica. They had never reached Athens. Now Paul in his sermons was showing from Scripture that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah.

6. But when the Jews refused to believe and started cursing Paul, accusing him of blasphemy by making a man into God, Paul shook the dust off his feet and said, "I will not preach here again. I've done so in all innocence and sincerity. You will have to assume the consequences of your own unbelief. From now on I'll concentrate on the Gentiles."

7. He left the synagogue and was invited by Justus, a Greek who had been worshiping with the Jews, to come next door to his house and to preach there.

8. Crispus, the president of the local synagogue, was another who, together with his whole family, believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Soon many other people in Corinth, when they heard the good news of salvation, believed and were baptized.

9. That night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and said to him, "Don't be afraid, but continue to preach and don't think about stopping.

10. I am with you and will see to it that no one will hinder you, because I have many people in this city who will hear and believe."

11. So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, preaching and teaching the word of God.

12. This was about the same time when Gallio was governor of the southern part of Greece. Now the Jews stirred up the people until it looked like an insurrection. Then they took Paul and dragged him to the town square in front of the courthouse and then asked to see the governor.

13. When Gallio came out, they said to him, "This fellow is going all over town telling our people to worship God in ways contrary to our law. Our religion is recognized by the state and we don't want it perverted."

14. Just as Paul was about to say something in his own defense, Gallio said to the Jews who were the leaders in all this, "If this were a question of civil disobedience or a crime of some sort, I would gladly listen to you.

15. But since it's a question of Jewish theology and a dispute about words and distinctions within your own religion, you settle it. I will not sit in judgment on your beliefs."

16. So he dismissed them and had them driven from the town square.

17. Then the crowd turned from Paul and grabbed Sosthenes, the new president of the local synagogue and the one who had led out in the disturbances, and beat him unmercifully right in front of the courthouse. But Gallio could not have cared less.

18. So Paul stayed in Corinth for quite some time, but finally decided to leave. After saying goodbye to the believers, he boarded a ship, and together with Aquila and Priscilla, left for Syria. Their first stop was Cenchrea. There Paul made a personal vow to God, and as a sign that he had taken this vow, cut off some of his hair to carry with him to Jerusalem, where he would shave his whole head and then burn his hair on the altar with his sacrifice.

19. The next day, their ship docked at Ephesus, where they disembarked and where Paul and Aquila and Priscilla had to part. While waiting for the next ship out, Paul attended the synagogue and held numerous discussions with the Jews.

20. When they asked him to stay, he told them he couldn't because of the vow he had taken.

21. Then just before he left, he said to them, "Even though I have to go to Jerusalem to keep this vow and to attend the Passover, if it is God's will, I will come back to visit you." So he boarded the ship and sailed toward Palestine.

22. Next, their ship docked at Caesarea and from there they made their way on foot south to Jerusalem. After Paul completed his vow and greeted the church leaders, he headed back north to Antioch from where he had begun both his missionary journeys.

23. There he rested for some time and then decided to go once again through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia to encourage and strengthen the believers.

24. About this same time, a Jew named Apollos, born in Alexandria in Egypt, came to Ephesus. He was a most eloquent speaker and had a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.

25. He had heard some things about Jesus and the message John the Baptist had preached, and he believed what he had heard. So he enthusiastically preached the little he knew, which was the need to repent and be baptized.

26. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue about the Messiah and when Aquila and Priscilla heard him and noticed how committed he was to the truth he knew, they invited him home to dinner. There they helped him to understand the good news of salvation more fully.

27. Then Apollos decided to move on and to go from Asia Minor over into Greece. Before he left, the believers in Ephesus gave him a letter of recommendation, telling the believers there that he was trustworthy and asking them to warmly welcome him. When he arrived, he was a tremendous help to the believers, especially to those who had recently given their hearts to God and were seeking to understand His grace more fully.

28. Apollos did not hesitate to publicly debate with the Jews, showing them from the Scriptures that Jesus Christ was the Messiah.

CHAPTER 19

1. **While** Apollos was preaching in Corinth, Paul went across Asia Minor and arrived in Ephesus as promised. When he was introduced to the newest believers, he asked them,

2. "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you were baptized and became Christians?" They said, "What's the Holy Spirit? We've never heard that before."

3. Then Paul said, "The Holy Spirit is a Person. And since you don't know about the Holy Spirit, what kind of instructions were you given and what kind of baptism did you receive?" They said, "We were

instructed and baptized according to John the Baptist's baptism."

4. Paul said, "That's good. John insisted that those who were to be baptized must first repent of their sins and change their lives. He also told the people to believe in the One who would follow him, that is, in the Lord Jesus Christ."

5. Then Paul shared more truth with them about the importance of baptism, of Jesus as the Messiah, and of receiving the Holy Spirit. Then he rebaptized them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

6. He also laid his hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came on them just as He came to the disciples at Pentecost. And these new believers not only spoke in other languages, but some of them received the gift of proclamation.

7. Altogether there were about twelve of them who were rebaptized and were filled with the Holy Spirit.

8. Then for the next three months Paul preached in the local synagogue as boldly as ever, persuading the people and telling them about the kingdom of God.

9. But, as usual, some of them were stubborn and refused to believe and spoke evil of the Christian faith in front of the people. So Paul stopped attending the synagogue and took with him those who believed. Every day he taught them in the lecture hall of Tyrannus from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., sharing with the people the good news of salvation.

10. This went on for two years, with one group finishing and another beginning until nearly everyone in Ephesus and the surrounding area, whether Jew or Gentile, had heard about the Lord Jesus Christ.

11. During this time, God worked special miracles through Paul, giving even more credibility to his work.

12. In fact, people got hold of handkerchiefs and work aprons which he had used, and passed them around to those who were sick. As soon as these objects were laid on them, the sick were healed. Even those who were demon possessed were healed and freed from the spirits.

13. About this same time, some Jews

who traveled around the country claiming to have the power to cast out demons came to Ephesus. When they saw what Paul was doing and how he was doing it, they tried to use the name of Jesus to cast out demons just as he did. They thought it was some kind of magic formula and that all they would have to say to the demons was, "We command you in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches to come out!"

14. There were seven brothers who planned to do this and they were the sons of a leading Jewish priest named Sceva.

15. The very first time they tried it, the evil spirit answered them and said, "Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you?"

16. Then the man who had the evil spirit attacked the brothers with such violence that he overpowered them all, and all seven of them ran out of his house bleeding and half naked.

17. It didn't take long for the word to get around. Then all the Jews and Gentiles in Ephesus treated Paul with great respect and feared the name of Jesus.

18. This gave courage to the believers and they came confessing their sins and admitting that they were still practicing magic.

19. Many of them who had been quietly practicing magic had also been consulting evil spirits. They now brought their books of magic and divination and burned them in the public square. The cost of these books was estimated to be more than fifty thousand pieces of silver, one piece being the equivalent of one day's wage.

20. This is how powerful the word of the Lord was as it kept spreading and growing.

21. Then Paul decided to cross from Asia Minor over into Greece, to visit the churches there before returning to Jerusalem. He told himself that after this trip, he would rest up, and for his next missionary journey take the good news of salvation to Rome and then on to Spain.

22. So he sent two of his assistants, Timothy and Erastus, ahead of him into Macedonia while he finished his work in Ephesus.

23. About this time, the whole city seemed to explode with violence against

the gospel.

24. It all started when a certain man named Demetrius, who with others was making silver statuettes of the goddess Diana and replicas of her temple and selling these at a very good profit, began losing business.

25. So he called all the craftsmen together for an outdoor rally to form a silversmith's labor union and said to them, "Men, you know that we have a good income from this trade of ours.

26. And you can see what's happened to our business. Now all you have to do is listen to this pagan fellow, Paul, and watch the people flocking to hear him to know that soon we'll be out of business. He's telling them that Diana is not a goddess and that her statue was not sent to us from heaven. He's telling people that it's just an image invented by human beings. And lots of people believe him, not only here in Ephesus but throughout Asia Minor. So our business will not only be affected here, but throughout the whole region, and our tourist trade will be hurt, because a lot of people come just to see Diana's statue.

27. Furthermore, what about the future of our city? And, to make it worse, what about Diana's temple? It will lose all of its attraction, because Diana's influence will be gone and people throughout the Roman Empire won't come here to worship her anymore!"

28. When the craftsmen and the other businessmen who attended the meeting heard this, they became furious and started shouting, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

29. Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The crowd which had been listening to all of this became violent and grabbed Gaius and Aristarchus, two of the Greek believers who had been traveling with Paul, and shoved them along toward the town's sports arena.

30. When Paul, who was watching from a distance, saw what was happening, he wanted to rush in and speak to the crowd, but the believers held him back and wouldn't let him risk his life.

31. Even some of the city officials, who had become Paul's friends, sent him a

message telling him that he should stay away.

32. Meanwhile, the crowd had reached the arena and there was total confusion, with some people shouting one thing and others shouting something else. Some people didn't even know why they were there.

33. The Jews saw this as a chance to get at Paul, so they pushed Alexander out front to talk to the crowd and to tell the people what this was all about. Alexander motioned with his hands to quiet the crowd and tried to defend himself, because the people thought he was the troublemaker.

34. But when the people saw that he was a Jew speaking for his own cause and not for Diana, they all started chanting, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" and they kept this up for the next two hours.

35. Finally, the city clerk was able to quiet them down and said, "People of Ephesus, who doesn't know that our city is the home of Diana and that we worship her? Everyone knows where her temple is and that her statue fell from heaven as a gift from Zeus, the chief god in our pantheon.

36. No one can argue against this fact. So you ought to calm down before you do something rash which will hurt our city and which you'll later regret.

37. You grabbed and shoved these two men through the streets and brought them here for trial when you know that they're harmless. They're not robbers. They haven't defiled our temple or stolen anything from it. Neither have they said anything bad about it, nor have they cursed our goddess.

38. Now if Demetrius and his union workers have some legitimate complaints against anyone, he should come to see us on the regularly scheduled court days, when judges on duty can hear his charges and settle the whole thing legally.

39. And if any of you have personal complaints, those, too, can be settled in court or in a lawfully called meeting of all the citizens.

40. The way you've carried on today looks more like a riot than a meeting where public complaints are heard. In fact, we

may still be called into question by the Romans for what has happened here today, especially since there was no reason for it."

41. After he finished, he dismissed the crowd, and the people went home quietly.

CHAPTER 20

1. **When** the commotion was all over, Paul called the believers together, hugged each one of them, and, with words of encouragement, said goodbye. Then he left, heading northward, and then, going in a westerly direction, crossed over into Greece.

2. When he had gone through the upper part of Greece encouraging the believers, he turned southward and finally arrived in Corinth.

3. He stayed there for about three months and then decided to sail back home. But when he heard that some Jews had plotted to kill him while on the trip, he changed his plan and decided to retrace his steps and go by foot through the northern parts of Greece, and then head east toward the coast and catch a ship from there.

4. Some of those who joined our group were Sopater, the son of Pyrrhus from Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica; Gaius from Derbe; Tychicus and Trophimus from Ephesus; and Timothy.

5. Now these men decided to go ahead of us back into Asia Minor and to meet us in Troas.

6. The rest of us followed, going more slowly. When we arrived at Philippi, we stayed long enough to keep the Passover, also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Here we boarded a ship, and five days later arrived at Troas, where we caught up with the rest of our party.

7. We stayed there a few days, and after sundown on Sabbath, the believers got together for a potluck supper to say goodbye to Paul. That evening he spoke to them until midnight, after which he hoped to get a few hours sleep before leaving early Sunday morning.

8. Now the whole upper floor of the meeting place was lighted by brightly

burning torches, which also made the place quite warm.

9. As Paul talked on, a young man named Eutychus decided to sit in the open window to catch the cool night breeze. While he was sitting there listening to Paul, he fell asleep, lost his balance, and fell three stories to the ground. The believers rushed down, but when they tried to help him up, he was dead.

10. Then Paul went downstairs, leaned over the young man's body, hugged it to himself, then looked at the believers and said, "Don't be shaken. The Lord has decided to return his life."

11. Then the young man got up and the believers rejoiced and went back upstairs and celebrated the Lord's Supper. Afterward, Paul talked to them again and continued until early in the morning. As the day began to dawn, they finally said goodbye, and we were on our way.

12. The young man who had fallen was alive and well, and his whole family gave thanks to Paul and went home grateful for what the Lord had done.

13. Then we went down to the docks and boarded a ship heading on down the coast to Assos, just as Paul had told us to. He decided to make the trip by foot, and we were supposed to meet him there.

14. When Paul arrived at Assos, he came on board, and from there we sailed on to Mitylene.

15. The next day we arrived at Chios, the day after, at Samos. Next, we stopped and took on supplies at Trogyllium, and the following day we docked at Miletus.

16. We had purposely found a ship that would be sailing past Ephesus, because Paul didn't want to be detained by spending more time in Asia Minor. He wanted to be able to get to Jerusalem in time for the Jewish festival of Pentecost.

17. But Paul had sent a message to Ephesus, asking the church elders to come down to Miletus to meet him there.

18. When they came, he talked to them confidentially and said, "You remember the kind of man I was from the first day I came to Asia Minor and visited you, as well as during my stay there?"

19. I didn't serve the Lord proudly but

shed many tears. I went through some hard times, especially when my own people tried to kill me.

20. You know that I didn't hold anything back from you, but told you everything that was for your own good. I talked straight to you and what I taught you in your homes I also preached publicly.

21. I made no difference between Jew and Gentile but told all of them that they needed to repent and change their ways and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

22. Now I'm duty bound to go to Jerusalem in obedience to the Holy Spirit, not knowing exactly what awaits me there.

23. The only thing I know is that in almost every city on the way coming here, the Holy Spirit, through one means or another, has told me that I would have nothing but trouble there and would finally be arrested and imprisoned.

24. But I'm not really disturbed by all of this because my life doesn't mean that much to me. The only thing that really matters is for me to finish my life doing joyously the work the Lord Jesus called me to do when he first asked me to preach the gospel.

25. I want you to know how much you've meant to me and still do, from the first day I preached the gospel to you. But I'm afraid we'll never see each other again.

26. So I want to go on record in front of all of you that I'm innocent if any of you lose your way.

27. I've told you everything you need to know in order to be saved, and I've explained God's whole purpose for mankind to you and held nothing back.

28. So be careful to keep an eye on yourselves and on the rest of the sheep in the church. The Holy Spirit has selected you to be their shepherds and to care for them and feed them as the Lord's personal property, which He paid for with His own blood.

29. I just know that, after I'm gone, wolves will make their way in among the sheep and won't hesitate to attack them.

30. Even from within your own group, men will begin to teach the people different things, and there will always be some who will believe what they say and turn

them into heroes.

31. So be alert and remember that for three years I carefully taught you and did so day and night with tears.

32. Now, my brothers, I commit you to the care of God and to the grace and power of His word. It is through the Scriptures that He will make you grow and become strong and keep you steadfast and loyal. God will continue to do this for you until He comes to give you the inheritance He planned for you to have; and not only for you, but for all those who believe in Him and set themselves apart to live for Him.

33. Also, I want to tell you that I have never longed for anyone's money, whether it was silver or gold, nor for fine clothes or a leisure life.

34. You know how hard I worked making tents in order to support myself and those who were with me.

35. One reason I did this is to leave you an example of what it means to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Also, to let you know that it is your responsibility as elders to do manual labor, if you have to, to help support yourselves and, if need be, your brothers also. I want you to remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who said, 'Happiness and blessedness come not from receiving, but from giving.'"

36. When Paul finished speaking, we all knelt on the shore, and he prayed for the elders, committing them to the Lord.

37. Then, when we got up, we were all crying, and the elders hugged Paul and said goodbye.

38. The elders were crying because they felt that they would probably never see him again. So they walked him to the ship and said a final farewell. As the ship sailed off, they stood and waved goodbye for as long as they could see us.

CHAPTER 21

1. After we pulled out from port, we took a straight course toward Cos. The next day we reached Rhodes, and from there we sailed on to Patara.

2. Here we disembarked and looked for a ship going to Phoenicia, the region just north of Palestine. When we found

one, we booked a passage, and in a matter of hours we sailed.

3. After some days, we passed Cyprus on our left and then headed southeast toward the coast of Lebanon. We made a stop at Tyre because the ship had to unload most of its cargo there.

4. We stayed in Tyre about a week. When we found some believers, they invited us to stay with them, and we did. While we were there, they warned Paul by the power of the Holy Spirit what would happen to him once he got to Jerusalem, and they told him not to go.

5. When the week was up, we said goodbye and started on our way to the docks. And the men decided to go with us, together with their wives and children, to see us off. So we walked through the city and down to the docks, and on the beach we all knelt down and prayed.

6. Then, after we said a final goodbye, we boarded the ship. They waved goodbye and went back home.

7. So from Tyre we sailed south along the coast to Ptolemais where again we greeted the believers and were invited to stay with them overnight.

8. The next day we sailed and continued along the coast until we came to Caesarea, where we disembarked and stayed with Philip, the evangelist, who was one of the original seven deacons.

9. He had four unmarried daughters, all of whom had the gift of prophecy.

10. We stayed a number of days. While we were there, a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of prophecy, arrived from Judea.

11. When he met Paul, he reached over and took Paul's belt, wrapped it first around his own feet and then around his hands and said, "This is a message from the Holy Spirit. The owner of this belt will have his hands and feet shackled by the Jews in Jerusalem and be turned over to the Gentiles for trial and execution."

12. When we heard these words and realized that execution was what awaited Paul, we begged him not to go to Jerusalem.

13. But Paul responded to our plea by saying, "What are you trying to do? Why

are you crying like this? You're breaking my heart! You know that I've always obeyed the Holy Spirit and I'm not going to change now. If He's leading me to Jerusalem, and I firmly believe He is, I want to thank Him for warning me about what to expect when I arrive. In fact, I'm not only willing to go and be arrested in Jerusalem, but I'm willing to die there for the Lord Jesus if that's what He wants me to do."

14. When he wouldn't change his mind, we stopped begging him to stay and said, "May the Lord's will be done."

15. After spending a few more days there, we packed our things, and headed for Jerusalem on foot.

16. Some of the believers from Caesarea decided to go with us. After the first day of walking, they took us to the house of a man called Mnason, who was originally from Cyprus, but who had settled in Palestine. He was one of the first believers in this area. We stayed overnight with him.

17. The following day we finally arrived in Jerusalem. The believers there were thrilled to see us and gave us a most warm welcome.

18. The next day we went with Paul to see James, the stepbrother of Jesus and the leader of the church in Jerusalem. All the elders were present.

19. Paul greeted them radiantly and then gave them a complete report of everything that God had done for the Gentiles through his ministry.

20. When he had finished, they all praised God and then said to him, "Paul, God has also blessed us. Since you've been gone, thousands of Jews have accepted the Lord Jesus as the Messiah. And they are just as zealous in keeping the laws of Moses now as they were before they became Christians. They don't believe that Gentile Christians must keep all these laws, but they do believe that Jewish Christians must do so if they want to be saved.

21. Now the problem we face is that some of these new believers are upset over what they've heard about you. They've been told that you're teaching the Jewish Christians living outside of Palestine not to worry about keeping the laws of Moses,

that they shouldn't circumcise their children anymore, nor should they observe other Jewish customs.

22. And as soon as word gets out and they hear that you're in town, they will call a meeting to discuss this whole thing. Our worry is how to keep this from polarizing the church.

23. Our suggestion is this: we have four men who have taken the Nazarite vow of recommitment about three weeks ago just as you have. They have still one week of fasting and prayer to go and we would like you to be their sponsor.

24. So why don't you guide them through the purification ceremony and pay for their Temple sacrifices and other expenses? To complete their vow, they need to have their heads shaven by the priest and then have their hair burned with their sacrifice on the altar. In this way, our people here will know that there is no truth in what they've heard about you because they will see for themselves that, as a Jewish Christian, you still believe it's necessary to keep the laws of Moses. It'll be a compromise, but it'll be worth it.

25. Now as far as the Gentiles are concerned, they don't need to observe all these laws because, as you remember, we agreed earlier not to require all this of them. We even sent a letter to them and asked them to keep only three things in mind: First, to abstain from foods offered to idols. Second, not to eat meat from animals that have been strangled and that still has blood in it; and, third, not to get caught up in immorality and in other sexual vices that are plaguing the world. But here in Jerusalem we're concerned about the problem we have with Jewish Christians."

26. Paul agreed to follow their advice and to make the Jewish Christians happy. So the next day he took the four men the apostles and elders had introduced him to, and together they went to the Temple. There they gave notice when their fast would end, made an appointment to have their heads shaven, and also made arrangements to have the priest offer their sacrifices for them.

27. Now near the end of that week, when Paul and the others he was sponsor-

ing were about to end their thirty days of purification, some Jews from Asia Minor visiting Jerusalem were also in the Temple. When they spotted Paul, they grabbed him and started shouting and pointing at him until they attracted a sizeable crowd.

28. They kept on shouting, "Men of Israel! Help! This is the man who talks against the people of Israel! He talks against the law of Moses! And he talks against the Temple! He does this everywhere he goes! He's even brought some Gentiles into this sacred place! He has defiled the Temple!"

29. They had seen Paul and Trophimus from Ephesus earlier that week walking in the city. So now they supposed that Paul had brought him into the Temple and defiled it.

30. Suddenly there was nothing but confusion in the Temple, and the news spread like wildfire through the whole city. Then the people took hold of Paul and dragged him into the courtyard and closed the Temple doors behind him.

31. The crowd was determined to beat Paul to death, but someone told the commander of the Roman guard that there was a riot in the Temple and that the whole city was in an uproar.

32. He immediately alerted his troops, and they rushed down to the Temple and toward the crowd. When the people saw the troops coming, they stopped beating Paul and left him lying in the courtyard.

33. The commander told his troops to arrest Paul and put the chains on him. Then he turned to the crowd and said, "Who is this man and what has he done?"

34. Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another. Amid such confusion the commander couldn't make out what had happened. So he ordered his men to take Paul back to headquarters to find out for himself what the trouble was. As the troops left with Paul, the angry crowd went along, shouting as they went.

35. When they got to the stairs leading to the barracks, the soldiers had to carry Paul on their shoulders to protect him from the people, which by now were ready to kill him.

36. They were trying to get their hands

on Paul and were shouting, "Kill him! Kill him!"

37. When the soldiers were about half-way up the stairs, they let Paul down. He then turned to the commander and said, "Sir, could I speak with you a moment?" The commander was surprised to hear Paul speaking Greek and said, "Where did you learn to speak Greek?"

38. Aren't you the Egyptian who just a little while ago set up camp in the desert to train four thousand insurgents?"

39. Paul said, "No, I'm a Jew, born in Tarsus, which is a major city in Cilicia honored by the Romans. I'm not a terrorist leader. Please, let me speak to these people."

40. The commander agreed to let him speak. So Paul, standing on the steps, motioned to the crowd to be quiet because he had something to say. Finally, the crowd quieted down somewhat, and he spoke to them in Hebrew, saying:

CHAPTER 22

1. "Brothers and fathers, listen to me. I want to say something in my defense."

2. When they heard him speak to them in Hebrew, they quieted down even more and listened, so he continued,

3. "I'm a fellow Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, which is in Asia Minor. I was educated right here in Jerusalem under the great teacher Gamaliel. He taught me all about our ancestors, the importance of the laws of Moses, and how to be zealous for the honor of God, as all of you are.

4. I even became a member of the Sanhedrin and used my zeal to persecute those who followed in the way of Jesus, the Nazarene. I arrested them, had them thrown in jail, and demanded their execution.

5. The High Priest and the council members know all this, and they know that I'm telling you the truth because they were the ones who authorized me to do this. They even gave me permission to go to Damascus and arrest the followers of Jesus there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for trial.

6. Now it so happened that as I neared Damascus about noontime, suddenly a

bright light appeared in the sky. It came down and totally engulfed me.

7. This light was so forceful that it literally knocked me to the ground, and a voice spoke to me saying, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

8. I answered, 'Who are you, Sir?' The voice said, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, the One you are persecuting.'

9. The men who were with me saw the light; they heard a voice, but not distinctly enough to understand it.

10. Then I asked, 'Lord, what do you want me to do?' The Lord said, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you'll be told what I want you to do.'

11. Then the light disappeared. When I got up, I found that I was blind. And those who were with me had to lead me the rest of the way to Damascus.

12. Now in Damascus there lived a man named Ananias, a very religious man who carefully kept the laws of Moses and who was highly respected by all the Jews in the community.

13. He came to see me, stood next to me, put his hands on my head, and said, 'Brother Saul, open your eyes and you will see again.' Instantly I felt a change in my eyes. I opened them and I could see!

14. Then Ananias said to me, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to do a special work. He sent the Righteous One to appear to you personally so you would know who He was. He was the One who spoke to you on the way here.

15. God wants you to witness for him by telling everyone what happened to you and what you have seen and heard.

16. So why wait? Get up and let me baptize you as a witness to your change of heart and the washing away of your sins, calling on the name of Jesus.'

17. After some time, I came back to Jerusalem. One day as I was worshipping God in the Temple and praying to him, I was suddenly given a vision.

18. In the vision I saw the Righteous One, whose voice I had heard on the way to Damascus. He said to me, 'Hurry, get out of Jerusalem. This is not where I want you to start witnessing for me, because

most of the people here won't accept what you have to say.'

19. And I answered and said, 'Lord, the people here know how zealous I was for the laws of Moses and how I went into the synagogues and houses of the believers, arrested them, had them flogged, and then imprisoned them because they accepted you as the Messiah.

20. And when Stephen witnessed on your behalf before the Sanhedrin and was then condemned to be stoned, I approved of his execution by standing there and keeping an eye on the coats of those who threw the stones. But now I'm changed, and this should be a powerful witness to everyone who knew me before.'

21. Then the Lord said, 'I want you to leave the city now, and I want you to take the good news of salvation to the Gentiles.'"

22. Up to this point, the crowd carefully listened to what Paul had to say, but when he told them that the God of the Jews had sent him to offer salvation to the Gentiles, they began shouting in Hebrew, saying, "Away with him! Kill him! He's not fit to live!"

23. Then they screamed, took their coats off, waved them in the air, and threw dust and dirt into the air and at Paul to show their anger and contempt for him.

24. When the Roman commander saw what was happening, he immediately ordered his men to grab Paul, take him upstairs, and flog him until they could find out what the Jews were screaming about and why they hated him so much.

25. The guards carried out their orders, grabbed Paul, took him upstairs, stripped him to the waist, tied him to the whipping post, and were ready to flog him, but he was able to get the attention of the officer in charge and said, "It's really against the law for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't been convicted of any crime."

26. When the officer heard this, he quickly went to see the commander and said, "We better be careful what we do to this man. He claims to be a Roman citizen!"

27. Then the commander went to talk to Paul and asked him, saying, "Are you a

Roman citizen?" And Paul said, "Yes, I am."

28. The commander responded and said, "I'm also a Roman citizen, but I had to pay a lot of money for that privilege." Then Paul said, "But I'm a citizen by birth."

29. When those who were ready to flog and question Paul to find out what the Jews were screaming about heard this, they backed off. And the commander himself became concerned, because he had put a Roman citizen in chains before giving him the right of a trial.

30. **Then** he ordered the guards to untie Paul, but held him in custody until the next day when he would try some other way to find out what the uproar was all about. The next day he decided to order the chief priests to call a special meeting and he made Paul stand in front of them to plead his own defense.

CHAPTER 23

1. First Paul looked around at every member of the Council and then straight at the High Priest and said, "Brothers, I have lived as a good Roman citizen and before God in all good conscience all my life until this very day."

2. Then Ananias, the newly appointed High Priest, told one of the Temple guards standing close to Paul to slap him across the mouth, which the guard promptly did.

3. Paul responded by saying, "God will certainly notice what you ordered this guard to do. How can you sit there and judge me about breaking the law of Moses when you break his laws yourself? You ordered this man to beat me, and you know that it's against the law to do this to an accused person until he's proven guilty. You're nothing but a white-washed wall around a dead man's tomb."

4. Those standing nearby said to Paul, "Do you know who you're talking to? That's the High Priest!"

5. Then Paul apologized and said, "My fellow Israelites, I'm sorry I spoke the way I did. I didn't know that he was the new High Priest. The law of Moses says, 'You should never speak evil of the ruler of your people.'"

6. Now as the proceedings continued,

Paul soon noticed that some of the council members were Pharisees and others were Sadducees. So at a convenient moment, he spoke loudly enough for everyone there to hear. "Fellow Israelites, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and I am being tried because I preach the resurrection of the dead!"

7. Immediately the Pharisees started defending him and began arguing with the Sadducees over whether the dead are raised, and the Council was divided.

8. They were divided because the Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection of the dead as the Pharisees do. Nor do the Sadducees believe in the physical realities of a future life or in the existence of heavenly beings as the Pharisees do.

9. Soon the arguing turned into a shouting match and the Pharisees stood up and shouted, "We can't find anything wrong with this man! Maybe a heavenly being did speak to him!"

10. Then some of the Pharisees and Sadducees came down to where Paul stood, and each side started pulling at him to get him away from the other group. Their actions became so violent that the Roman commander was afraid they would tear Paul apart. So he ordered his troops to restore order and to take Paul back to the barracks.

11. The Lord did not send his angel during the night to free Paul as he had done to free Peter, because the church in Jerusalem had not prayed and cared for Paul as they had prayed and cared for Peter. But the Lord himself appeared to Paul that night to comfort him and said, "Cheer up, Paul, you have given an excellent witness about me in Jerusalem. Nothing will happen to you here because I want you to give a similar witness about me in Rome."

12. The next day certain young men among the Jews met together and took an oath that they would not eat or drink anything until they had killed Paul.

13. About forty of them agreed to this plot.

14. After they had agreed among themselves, they went to the leading priests and elders and in a secret meeting spoke

with them and said, "We have taken an oath not to eat or drink anything until we have killed this man Paul.

15. Now if you could make arrangements with the commander of the Roman guard to bring Paul down to the Council just one more time, we promise that on the way here, we'll break through the guard and kill him."

16. When Paul's young nephew, who was his sister's son, heard people whisper about a plot to kill his uncle on the way to the Council, he told his mother, and she sent him running to the Roman barracks to tell Paul.

17. When Paul heard this, he asked permission from one of the guards to see the officer in charge. When he came, Paul said to him, "Please take this young man to see the commander because he has something urgent to tell him. It has to do with a plot of the Jews to deceive him."

18. The officer took the youngster to the commander and said, "The prisoner, Paul, asked me to bring this young man to see you because he has heard people whisper about a plot to deceive you."

19. The commander took the boy by the hand and led him off to one side and said, "Tell me, what is it that you heard about a plot to deceive me?"

20. The boy said, "The people are whispering to each other that the Jewish leaders have agreed to ask you tomorrow to bring Paul down to the Council just one more time to find out a little more about him, and to ask him a few more questions.

21. But don't listen to them because forty men will be waiting to break through the guard on the way there to kill him. They've even taken an oath not to eat or drink anything until he's dead. They're just waiting for the word from you."

22. Then the commander said to the boy, "Don't tell anyone that you've told me. Thank you. You can go now."

23. Immediately he called in two officers and said, "Get two hundred foot soldiers ready to march north toward Caesarea. And get seventy horsemen and two hundred front-line spearmen to go with them. I want them all ready to leave by nine o'clock tonight.

24. Also, I want a couple of horses for the prisoner Paul. He'll have to change off because he'll be riding most of the night. I want him to reach the safety of Governor Felix's palace in Caesarea sometime tomorrow."

25. Then he sat down and wrote the following letter:

26. "From Commander Claudius Lysias to his Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings.

27. A few days ago the Jews seized a man named Paul and were about to kill him. When I found out that he was a Roman citizen, I sent my troops down to the Temple to rescue him.

28. I wanted to find out what this was all about and so made arrangements to take him before their Council the next morning.

29. I discovered that he had not committed any crime and certainly didn't deserve to die or even to be put in prison. The accusations against him had to do with various interpretations of their religious laws.

30. That afternoon I was told about a plot to deceive me into bringing Paul down to the Council just one more time and on the way certain Jews would try to break through the guard to kill him. That's why I quickly decided to send him to you for safety. I've also told his accusers to bring the charges they have against him to Caesarea. Farewell."

31. That night at nine o'clock the troops carried out their orders, took Paul, and by early morning had brought him as far as Antipatris, which is about half way to Caesarea and about thirty miles from Jerusalem.

32. Then the two hundred foot soldiers and the two hundred front-line spearmen rested and the next day returned to Jerusalem, while the seventy horsemen went on with Paul to Caesarea.

33. When they finally arrived there, they went straight to the governor, delivered the letter, and handed Paul over to him as the commander had directed.

34. The governor read the letter and asked Paul where he was from. When he learned that he was from Tarsus in Cilicia,

which is in Asia Minor, he said to him,

35. "I'll keep you here where you'll be safe and will listen to the charges your accusers will bring." Then he ordered Paul to be kept under guard in the governor's palace.

CHAPTER 24

1. **About** five days later, Ananias, the new High Priest, together with some of the leading elders and Tertullus, the Council's attorney, arrived in Caesarea to see the governor to bring charges against Paul.

2. When the trial began, the governor asked the guards to bring in Paul. Then Tertullus was asked to state his charges. He began by saying, "Your Excellency. It is your wise leadership which has brought us such great peace to our land. And many evils are being corrected and reforms carried out by you for the good of our people.

3. We welcome your leadership everywhere and at all times and are deeply grateful for your presence in our country, most noble Felix.

4. I do not want to take up too much of your time and be tedious to you, so I ask you to listen kindly to our short statement of charges against this man Paul.

5. We have found him to be a rather dangerous man and a constant troublemaker. He's continuously stirring up the people and starting riots among the Jews everywhere he goes throughout the empire. He's the ringleader of the sect of the people we call the Nazarenes.

6. In addition, he has willfully defiled our Temple, and when we caught him, we were going to try him according to our law,

7. but the Roman commander in Jerusalem came with his troops and took him out of our hands.

8. Then he asked us to present our charges against this man to you here in Caesarea. And if you question the accused, you will find out for yourself that the charges we are bringing against him are true."

9. When Tertullus finished, the rest of the Jewish delegation confirmed what Tertullus had said.

10. Then the governor motioned for

Paul to speak in his own defense. So Paul addressed the governor and said, "I know that you've been the governor for a number of years and have heard numerous cases involving the Jews. So I'll gladly defend myself since you've asked me to do so.

11. It was about twelve days ago that I went to Jerusalem to worship, which you can easily verify.

12. And the Jews did not find me causing a riot in the Temple, nor arguing with anyone there, nor defiling it in any way. Neither have they ever found me doing this in their synagogues or anywhere else in Jerusalem.

13. They have no proof to substantiate their charges against me.

14. However, I must admit this to you. I do worship the God of my fathers in a way that the Jews call a sect. I believe everything Moses and the prophets have written, including what they have said about the Messiah.

15. But other than that, I have the same hope in God that they have. I believe in the resurrection of the dead, both good and bad, as most of them do, and that all of us will stand before the judgment seat of God, each one to answer for himself.

16. That's why I have always done my best to have a clear conscience, both before God and man.

17. After being away from my country for some time, I decided to come back to worship and to do what I could to help the poor among my own people. I brought some sizeable donations from many parts of the Roman Empire, given by people who really care.

18. It was while I was worshiping in the Temple and completing the payment for the purification ceremony for some of my poorer countrymen whom I was sponsoring that the Jews found me. I had not said anything to draw a crowd nor had I done anything to cause a tumult.

19. But some of the Jews visiting Jerusalem from parts of Asia Minor saw me worshiping in the Temple and started a riot. Then they pointed to me as the instigator and got me arrested. These are the men who should be here, bringing their

supposed charges against me.

20. Or, let those who are here tell you exactly what crime their Council found me guilty of when I stood in front of them the next day.

21. The only thing I can be charged with is for having said, 'The real reason I'm being tried by you today is that I believe and preach the resurrection of the dead.' This caused them to argue and they couldn't agree among themselves of what I was guilty."

22. When Paul had finished, Felix, who knew about the Christian way, closed the hearing and said, "When Lysias, the Roman commander, comes to Caesarea, I'll investigate the matter more carefully and then decide the case."

23. Then he ordered the officer in charge to keep Paul under guard, but to allow him freedom of movement and also to allow his friends to come to provide for his needs.

24. Some time later, the governor, accompanied by his Jewish wife, Drusilla, sent for Paul to listen to him in private and to ask him questions about his faith in Jesus Christ.

25. As Paul talked to them about justice, self-control, right-doing, and the Day of Judgment, Felix was visibly shaken and said, "You can go now, Paul. When it's convenient, I'll call for you again."

26. Now, he said this because he was hoping that Paul, in one of their future meetings, would offer to pay him for his release. That was why he frequently called for Paul and talked with him so often.

27. This went on for two years, but Felix would not release Paul because he didn't want to irritate the Jews. Finally, he was replaced by Festus, the next governor.

CHAPTER 25

1. **Three** days after Festus took office in Caesarea, he went down to visit Jerusalem.

2. While he was there, the High Priest and the leading elders told him the charges they had against Paul and begged him to settle the case.

3. They asked Festus to do them a favor by bringing Paul to Jerusalem and

letting them try him there, especially since the charges they had against him were religious and not civil. Their plan, however, was to get Paul to Jerusalem so they could kill him.

4. Festus said to them, "Since Paul is already held in custody in Caesarea and I'm going back there, why don't you come to Caesarea for the trial so I can sit and judge the case there.

5. In fact, why don't those of you who can do so come with me to Caesarea when I leave, and we can have the trial as soon as we get there."

6. About ten days later, Festus left Jerusalem for Caesarea and the Jews went with him. Festus kept his word, and the next day after they arrived, he convened the court, took his place as judge, and called for Paul.

7. Then the Jews who had come from Jerusalem with Festus stood up and started accusing Paul of all sorts of things, including things he was supposed to have done against Caesar, none of which could be proven.

8. But Paul defended himself well and concluded by saying, "I have done nothing wrong, neither against the laws of the Jews, nor against their Temple, nor against Caesar."

9. But Festus wanted to please the Jews and gain their friendship. So he asked Paul, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem with these men and defend yourself there?"

10. Paul answered and said, "I've already been tried there, and no charges have been proven against me. So I appeal to the next higher court. I appeal to Caesar for a hearing. Rightfully, that's where the next decision ought to be made and not in Jerusalem. Besides, I have done nothing against the Jews, as you yourself know.

11. If I were a criminal and I did something to deserve the death sentence, I'm willing to die for it. But if these accusations are false, which they are, then why should I be tried by the Jews? There's no assurance I'll get a fair trial there or even that I'll arrive safely in Jerusalem. That's the reason I'm appealing to Caesar."

12. After Festus heard Paul's appeal, he quietly conferred with his advisors and

then turned and said to Paul, "You're a Roman citizen. You have a right to appeal to Caesar. So to Caesar you will go." He then stood up and dismissed the court.

13. Not long afterward, King Agrippa and his wife Bernice came to Caesarea for a visit to congratulate Festus on his appointment as governor.

14. They stayed there for several days, and while they were there, Festus told them about Paul and said, "There's a man held prisoner here by the name of Paul who was put in custody by Felix.

15. When I took office, one of the first things I did was to visit Jerusalem. While I was there, the leading priests and city fathers told me about this man and wanted me to sentence him for crimes he supposedly committed against them and against Caesar.

16. I told them that it's not our custom as Romans to condemn a man without a trial before he has a chance to meet his accusers face to face and to defend himself.

17. So we set a time when I would leave Jerusalem and they came with me. The day after we arrived, I convened the court and ordered the prisoner to be brought in to meet his accusers and to defend himself against their charges.

18. Now when his accusers stated their charges, they didn't accuse him of any criminal act as I supposed they would.

19. But instead, their accusations had to do with their own theological questions. These questions centered particularly on a man called Jesus, who a few years ago, was executed by crucifixion and who Paul says is still alive.

20. Since I was at a loss in knowing how to investigate these charges without getting involved in a theological dispute, and didn't fully understand the charges myself, I asked him whether he would be willing to go with the Jews back to Jerusalem to be tried by them there.

21. But the prisoner appealed his case and asked to be tried in Caesar's court in Rome. So I issued the orders for him to be kept under guard and be taken to Rome for trial at the first opportunity."

22. Then Agrippa said, "I'd like to hear

this man myself." Festus replied, "Let's make it tomorrow, and I'll give you a chance to hear him."

23. The next day Festus and Agrippa came to the place of hearing with great pomp and ceremony. They were accompanied by military chiefs and the leading men of the city. When they were all seated, Festus ordered the guards to bring in Paul.

24. Then the governor addressed the dignitaries and guests and said, "King Agrippa, and all you men of rank, this is the man whom the Jews have accused of certain crimes and have been pleading with me both here and in Jerusalem to sentence him to die.

25. But when I examined him, I found that he was not a criminal and had done nothing to demand his execution. But because he appealed his case to a higher court and asked to be sent to Caesar, I decided to honor his request and to send him to Rome to be tried there.

26. So I have nothing with which to charge him, but I have brought him before all of you and especially before you, King Agrippa, to see if you can help me find something to charge him with before I send him to Rome.

27. It is quite unthinkable to send a prisoner to Caesar's court without telling him what the charges are."

CHAPTER 26

1. After Festus sat down, Agrippa turned to Paul and said, "You may now speak on your own behalf." So Paul raised his hand as a sign that he would do so and began his defense by saying,

2. "I consider it a privilege, King Agrippa, to have this opportunity to defend myself in your presence against all the charges the Jews have brought against me.

3. This is particularly so because you're familiar with the religious customs and practices of the Jews and with their theological disputes. So I beg of you to listen to me patiently.

4. Now the Jews know where I grew up and that I received my training right there in Jerusalem, and that all through my youth, I carefully observed all our cus-

toms and practices.

5. They also know, if they would only admit it, that I belonged to their strictest Jewish group, called the Pharisees. And for years I lived as a Pharisee.

6. I now stand before you to be tried because of the hope I have in the promise that God made to our forefathers.

7. It is this same hope in God's promise that has kept all the tribes of Israel worshiping the God of heaven day and night. And it is because of this hope that I am being called in question by the Jews.

8. Why should the people who are here with you think it so incredible that God's promise includes raising the dead?

9. Now at one time, I thought it best to rid the country of all those who believe that this happened in our day and that God raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead.

10. And I set out to do just that. In fact, I was authorized by the leading priests to do this. All over Jerusalem I arrested those suspected of being believers in Jesus Christ, even though they were my own countrymen. I had them locked up, and when they were tried and sentenced to death, I also voted against them.

11. This happened many, many times. In fact, I had them whipped right in their own synagogues and tried to get them to curse their faith. I was so furious with these people that I even went to other cities to look for them and hunt them down.

12. This is what I had in mind to do in Damascus. I had received permission from the leading priests to do the same thing there that I did in Jerusalem.

13. It was about noontime. I wasn't very far from Damascus when suddenly I saw a light coming down from heaven and coming right toward me. It was even brighter than the sun, and the next thing I knew, it had not only engulfed me, but also all those who were traveling with me.

14. All of us were knocked to the ground. And from somewhere out of that light, a voice spoke to me in Hebrew and said, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Why do you act like a mad ox kicking at its master's cattle prod?'

15. I finally found my voice and said,

‘Who are you, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus, the One you’re persecuting and fighting against.

16. Get up on your feet. I’ve come to let you know that I am alive and that I’m calling you to be my witness. I want you to tell others that you have seen me and talked with me. And I want you to tell them other things that I will show you later.

17. I will rescue you from your own people and be with you among the Gentiles to whom I send you.

18. I want you to open their eyes by telling them who I am, so they may see and turn from darkness to light and from the bewitching power of Satan to the power of God, so that they may have their sins forgiven, and have a place among those who grow in grace by faith in me.’

19. King Agrippa, I never turned against the commission given to me in that vision and don’t intend to do so.

20. Since that time, I have preached the good news of salvation in Damascus, Jerusalem, throughout Palestine, and in many parts of the Roman Empire to anyone who will listen. Everywhere I’ve been, I’ve urged people to change their ways, to repent of their sins, and to live for God.

21. This was the reason that, while I was worshiping in the Temple, the Jews grabbed me and dragged me into the courtyard to kill me.

22. But as God promised, He used others to rescue me. That’s why I can stand here now and share the good news of salvation with all of you. What I’m telling you is exactly what Moses and the prophets said would happen.

23. They said that the Messiah would come and suffer and die and be the first One to rise from the dead by His own power. They also said that the announcement would go out to the whole world that salvation is a free gift from God for anyone who is willing to accept it, whether they are Jews or Gentiles.”

24. At this point in Paul’s defense, Festus interrupted him, spoke up, and said, “Paul, you’re beside yourself! Too much study is pushing you over the edge of reason! It’s spacing you out!”

25. Paul answered and said, “I’m not out of my mind, Governor Festus. What I’m telling you is real. I am not going beyond reason. What I’m telling you is the sober truth.

26. King Agrippa knows what I’m talking about. That’s why I feel I can speak so openly without being misunderstood. I’m sure he’s heard about this, because what I’m telling you happened publicly for all to see.

27. King Agrippa, you believe what the ancient prophets have said, don’t you? I know you do!”

28. The king was convicted, but he answered Paul by saying, “Paul, do you think that with such a short speech you can persuade me to become a Christian?”

29. Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that you, the governor, and everyone here would become a Christian just as I am, except, of course, for these chains.”

30. Then the king stood up, signaled that the hearing was over, and the king’s wife and all those present left the assembly hall.

31. Once outside, the king and the governor stepped aside to confer with each other about Paul’s situation and could find nothing that Paul had done for which he should be kept in prison, much less for which he should die.

32. Then Agrippa said to Festus, “It’s my opinion, your Excellency, that this man could have legitimately been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

CHAPTER 27

1. **Soon** afterward, a date was set when we could sail with Paul to Italy. Paul and some other prisoners were placed in the custody of a Roman officer named Julius, who belonged to a special Roman detachment called the Emperor’s Regiment. He was made responsible for transporting the prisoners and for seeing that they reached Rome safely.

2. On the day set for us, we boarded a ship from the port city of Adramyttium in Asia Minor that had docked in Caesarea. It was ready to sail back home, stopping at some ports along the way. Now, I should

mention that among our group was a man called Aristarchus, a Macedonian believer from Thessalonica. He, together with Gaius, had been grabbed by the mob in Ephesus and hauled before the authorities for his faith.

3. We left Caesarea and sailed north along the coast, and the next day we arrived at Sidon. Here Julius was kind enough to allow Paul to visit his friends, to refresh himself, and to bring on board gifts that would make his trip to Rome a bit easier.

4. From Sidon we sailed in a more northwesterly direction and then around the northern tip of the island of Cyprus, rather than taking the more direct route and facing some rather contrary winds.

5. From here we headed straight west and sailed along the coastal waters of Cilicia and Pamphylia. This is where Paul had done so much missionary work. Finally, we anchored at Myra, a port city in the province of Lycia.

6. While in Myra, Julius, the Roman officer in charge, found a ship from Alexandria which was sailing to Italy and decided that we should board it instead.

7. We did, and then sailed slowly along the coast for a number of days because of a lack of good winds to take us out to sea. When we came to Cnidus, we pulled into port to take on supplies. The winds still weren't blowing west as expected, so we sailed south, heading for the eastern tip of the island of Crete with the port city of Salmone on our right.

8. Then, turning back west, we sailed along the southern part of the island to the coastal town of Fair Havens, which wasn't very far from the inland city of Lasea.

9. We spent more time there than we should have, so that by the time we left, sailing westward had become very dangerous. The Day of Atonement had already passed, and it was now the last of October when storms were much more frequent. Paul advised the owners of the ship, saying,

10. "Men, it seems to me that if we sail on ahead now, we're taking an unnecessary risk of being caught in a storm, and at this time of the year, it could be violent

enough to damage the ship, force us to throw some of the cargo overboard, and we could even lose our lives."

11. But Julius, the Roman officer in charge, listened to the owner of the ship, instead of listening to Paul, and decided to sail.

12. In addition, the sailors felt that Fair Havens was small and not a suitable place to spend the winter. Also, most of the passengers agreed to take the risk, and to sail a bit farther west along the coast to the more pleasant seaport of Phoenix.

13. So when the first good southwesterly wind came along, the decision was made to sail on to Phoenix. So the crew hoisted the sails, pulled up the anchor, and headed in a westerly direction, hugging the coastline of Crete as closely as we could.

14. But not long after we left the safety of the harbor, we were hit by a powerful wind which the sailors call the Northeaster. It came roaring down from the cliffs and hit us without mercy.

15. In fact, it hit our ship so hard that it was impossible to keep it on course without tearing the sails apart. Soon we gave up and let the ship be carried along by the wind.

16. After we had been blown miles out into the sea, we finally gained some relief when we passed just south of the tiny island of Clauda. With the gale somewhat subsided, we managed with difficulty to at least secure the lifeboat.

17. The little boat had been in tow and the sailors decided to hoist it on board and tie it down. Then they put ropes around the ship itself to help hold its planks together. They also quickly lowered the sails and just let the ship ride, because they were afraid that otherwise the winds would drive us south and into one of the many sandbanks off the coast of Lybia.

18. As soon as we passed the tiny island of Clauda, the gale winds hit us again. This time the storm became so violent that the crew started throwing some of the cargo overboard to lighten the ship to keep it from being flooded.

19. By the third day out, the storm was so bad that the crew started throwing some

of the ship's equipment overboard.

20. The winds continued to blow for days on end. And when we saw no indication of a break in the storm nor caught a glimpse of the sun or stars for many days, we lost all hope of coming out of this alive.

21. Everyone on board was seasick and hadn't eaten for days. Then Paul called all the passengers together and shouted above the wind, saying, "Men, you should have listened to me when I told you not to leave Fair Havens on the island of Crete. Then you wouldn't have had all this damage and loss.

22. But cheer up, because not one of you will lose your life even though we will lose the ship.

23. I know this because last night an angel appeared to me in a vision. He was sent by the God whom I worship, to whom I belong, and whom I serve, and he said to me,

24. 'Paul, don't be afraid. God plans for you to appear before Caesar. And in His goodness God has answered your prayers and will save everyone on board ship.'

25. So take courage and cheer up, because what my God says is always true and it will happen just as I've been told.

26. But we will be shipwrecked on an island not too far from here."

27. At midnight, on the fourteenth day after being driven out to sea and about five hundred miles off course, the sailors sensed that we were nearing land.

28. They managed to drop a line over the side with a heavy weight on the end of it, and when they pulled it up, the waters measured only one hundred twenty feet deep. A few hours later they measured only ninety feet.

29. Then everyone was afraid and expected that at any moment we would be smashed on the rocks. So they let down four anchors from the back of the ship, and we prayed that these would keep us in place at least until morning.

30. That night some of the sailors tried to escape and were in the process of lowering the lifeboat under the pretense of lowering additional anchors from the front of the ship.

31. Paul saw what was happening and

alerted the Roman officer in charge and said, "Those sailors are trying to escape, but unless we all stay together, there's no guarantee that all the passengers and crew will survive."

32. Then the officer ordered his soldiers to go to the front and cut the ropes of the lifeboat. They did so and let it drop into the sea.

33. Just before dawn, Paul begged everyone to try to eat something and said, "We've been in this storm for over fourteen days now, and most of us have hardly eaten a thing.

34. Please try to eat something. It will give you strength. And don't worry; not a hair will perish from the head of any one of you.

35. When he had finished encouraging everyone, he took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God, and then broke a piece off and ate it.

36. This gave the others courage, and they all began to eat.

37. I should mention that on board were about two hundred seventy six people.

38. After everyone had eaten, they lightened the ship still more by throwing the rest of the sacks of wheat into the sea.

39. When morning finally began to dawn, we could see a coastline in the distance, but the sailors couldn't recognize it. However, they did notice that it had a bay with a beach and that the bay looked as if it would be quite a safe place to run the ship aground.

40. So the crew hoisted the anchors, loosened the ropes holding the rudder in place, hoisted the sail near the front of the ship, and instantly we were heading for shore.

41. But the water was more shallow than we had thought, and soon we hit a sandbank with such force that the front of the ship stuck and wouldn't budge. The end of the ship was soon smashed to pieces by the violence of the waves.

42. Then the soldiers asked the officer for permission to kill the prisoners before they could escape, or else they would have to forfeit their own lives.

43. But the officer in charge wanted to save Paul, so he ordered all those who

could swim to jump overboard first and to head for shore.

44. Then those who could not swim were to go next and were to float ashore holding onto planks or other pieces of wood from the ship. And that's how all of us finally made it to land.

CHAPTER 28

1. After we came ashore, we learned that we were on the island of Malta.

2. The natives, even though they seemed quite primitive, were very kind to us. They helped us gather wood and start a fire in the more sheltered areas because it was still raining and we were all very cold.

3. Paul was gathering wood with the rest of us when, just as he threw his bundle of sticks on the fire, a small poisonous snake struck his hand and hung on.

4. When the natives saw this, they jumped back in awe and said, "This man must be a murderer, and though he has escaped the sea, the god of justice has caught up with him and decided that he should not be allowed to live."

5. But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects.

6. Everyone had expected to see his hand swell up, causing him to fall over dead, but as they watched, nothing happened. Then they changed their minds and said that Paul was a god.

7. Not far from the beach was the property and house of the island's chief, called Publius. When he heard what had happened, he invited Paul and his friends, together with the Roman officer in charge, to be his guests. He welcomed us courteously, treated us very kindly, and for the next three days, we stayed at his house.

8. When we first arrived, we found Publius' father in bed with a very high fever and sick with dysentery. So Paul went to the old man's room and prayed for him. He put his hands on the sick man, and instantly he was made well.

9. Then the news of the healing spread like magic through the whole island, and people from everywhere came bringing their sick to be healed. They were not

disappointed, for God through Paul healed them all.

10. They honored us and gave us many gifts. And when months later we sailed, they put on board whatever we needed.

11. We had stayed on the island for three months. Finally, we boarded a ship from Alexandria, Egypt, called The Twin Gods, which had also wintered there, and set sail for Italy.

12. Our first stop after we left Malta was at the seaport of Syracuse on the large island of Sicily just south of Italy. We docked there three days.

13. From Syracuse we took a straight run north, passing between Sicily and the southern tip of Italy at Rhegium. We rounded the tip of Italy and then caught a good wind coming up from the south and continued to sail north along Italy's west coast. A day later, we reached the city of Puteoli, where we disembarked.

14. Here we contacted some believers who invited us to stay with them for a whole week, if we could. The Roman officer in charge allowed us to accept the offer and to rest a bit before going on to Rome, which was about one hundred forty miles north.

15. So from Puteoli on, we made our way on foot. When we reached the market town called Appius, and later the town called Three Inns, still forty miles from Rome, a number of believers, who had heard that we were coming, came all the way down from Rome to meet us. This gave Paul added courage and he thanked God for their affection and care.

16. Finally, we reached Rome. Julius, the Roman officer in charge of our group, turned the prisoners over to the captain of the palace guard for imprisonment, but Paul was treated differently. Because of the role he played in the shipwreck and because of the respect that Julius had built up for him, he was placed under house arrest and allowed to rent a room nearby with a soldier guarding him.

17. Three days later, Paul sent word to the local Jewish leaders to come and meet with him. When they came, he said to them, "Brothers, I have done nothing against our people, nor have I broken any

tradition of our fathers of which I am accused. Yet I was jailed in Jerusalem and then handed over to the Roman governor in Caesarea.

18. When the governor examined me, he found me innocent of the charges brought against me and would have let me go because I had done nothing for which to die.

19. But when the Jews objected to my being set free and I could see that the Roman governor might turn me over to them for execution just to please them, I appealed to be tried at Caesar's court. I'm telling you this because I want you to know that, even though I was mistreated back home, I am not bitter and I am not planning to say anything against them.

20. This is the reason I called you here. I wanted to meet you and to explain to you why I was arrested. It has to do with my belief that the Messiah, the Hope of Israel, has already come. That's why I am bound with this chain."

21. The local leaders answered and said, "We haven't received any letters from Palestine telling us about you, nor has anyone come from there to accuse you of anything bad.

22. But we would like to hear what you believe about the Messiah because people everywhere are talking against this new religion that you say you belong to."

23. So they agreed with Paul on a time when a large number of them could meet with him in his room to hear what he had to say. The next time they met, Paul talked with them from morning until night, showing them from the Scriptures the true meaning of the kingdom of God. He also showed them from the books of Moses and the prophets that Jesus was the expected Messiah.

24. When he had finished, some of them were convinced and others were not and they started to argue among themselves.

25. In fact, they were still arguing among themselves as they left. But before they did, Paul spoke up and said, "The Holy Spirit was right when he spoke to our fathers and told the prophet Isaiah to say to them,

26. 'Go and say to these people, You listen and listen, but you still don't hear. You look and look, but you don't see.

27. The reason is that your hearts are not in the right place. So your minds are dull, your ears are closed, and your eyes can't see. If this were not the case, your eyes would be able to see, your ears hear, and you would understand and turn your lives around and come to me and I would heal you.'"

28. Then Paul added, "I hope you realize that God's message of salvation is also for the Gentiles, and whether you listen or not, many of them will."

29. The Jews didn't really hear what he said, but said goodbye to him and went out the door still arguing among themselves.

30. For the next two years, Paul remained under house arrest and stayed in his room, under guard twenty-four hours a day. But he was allowed to have visitors and to talk to anyone who came to see him.

31. When people did come to see him, he always shared with them the good news about the kingdom of God and boldly told them about the Lord Jesus Christ. He did this whether people just came off the street to see him out of curiosity or whether they worked in Caesar's palace and heard about him and wanted to know more of what he taught.

ROMANS

CHAPTER 1

1. This letter is from me, Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, chosen by Him to be an apostle, and then separated from my own people to spread the good news of what God has done

2. and how He has kept His promise which He gave through His prophets all through the Old Testament.

3. This promise centers in His Son Jesus Christ who in His human nature was from the lineage of King David,

4. but whose divine nature was verified by the power of the Holy Spirit through His holy and sinless life and finally His resurrection from the dead.

5. From Him all of us have received grace, and from Him I've received my apostleship to urge everyone, everywhere, no matter what nationality, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of mankind and to freely choose to live according to His teachings.

6. You also are among those who have responded to the call of Jesus Christ.

7. My greetings to everyone that is in Rome who has accepted the call to live for God. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

8. Before I say anything else, I want to thank God for all of you, for the fact that you've accepted Jesus Christ as Lord. Your vibrant faith is talked about everywhere I go.

9. Now God is my witness that I serve Him with my whole being. That is, I put my whole heart and soul into preaching the good news of salvation. And I always include you in my prayers.

10. So I'm asking God to allow me come to see you and to give me a safe trip on the way. That is, if it's His will that I should go.

11. The reason for this is, first of all, that I want to fellowship with you. Secondly, I want to help you become even more responsive to the Holy Spirit so He may impart additional spiritual gifts to help you build up the church, and to make you even stronger in faith than you are now.

12. Also, I need the comfort of your

faith which I know I'll receive as I fellowship with you, and so we'll both benefit by our mutual strength in the Lord Jesus Christ.

13. Brothers and sisters, I want you to understand that this isn't the first time I have tried to come see you. Several times I tried to come, but I was always stopped for one reason or another. I would really like to do some evangelism in Rome to convert some Gentiles in your city as I've done in other cities. I just can't imagine that Rome is as difficult a city to work in as some say.

14. Because of what Jesus Christ did for me, I'm indebted to Him to do what I can to help others, whether they are Greeks or barbarians, whether they are educated or uneducated.

15. That's why, so far as I'm able, I'm ready to preach the gospel to the people in Rome, too.

16. I'm not ashamed of the good news of salvation. Why should I be? It's the very power of God to save everyone who believes. It came first of all to the Jews and then to the Greeks.

17. In this power, the righteousness and goodness of God is seen, because salvation is a matter of faith and not of works. As the Scripture says, "God's people will be saved by trusting in Him and not by their own works."

18. The consequences of not looking to God for help are seen in the lives of the Gentiles who generally don't care about doing what's right. Heaven can't bless people when they say that they believe the truth about the God of heaven and then live as they please.

19. They can know the truth about our God without us telling them. People are not that dull. They can see how God's laws work in nature. His laws are plain enough for everyone to see and understand.

20. So even though we can't actually see God, we can understand what He's like and how He governs by looking at nature. That's how it's been since the creation of this world. We can understand the regenerative power of God and His

goodness by looking at the things He made, and that leaves people without excuse.

21. Now, I realize that there have been some people who, when they were convicted about God through His creation, still didn't respect Him, nor were they thankful for His blessings. In fact, they became arrogant and proud, and their senseless minds seemed to kill any kind of heart response they might have had to God.

22. They thought that they were very smart, but they actually became fools and acted that way.

23. In trying to make an image of the eternal God, they made Him look like a Roman hero, like a goat with a human upper body, like a bird, or even like a reptile.

24. That's why God couldn't do what He would like to have done for them. So He let them do what they wanted to do, no matter how revolting it was to Him. They were so lustful and filthy that they ravished each other's bodies worse than if they were animals.

25. By worshiping each other's bodies, they changed the truth about God into a lie and made Him look like a god of lust. They lived such greedy, self-serving lives that, they made the Creator look like that too. When in reality, He's the epitome of selflessness, for which we should be thankful and forever bless Him. So be it.

26. As we mentioned, God, being the kind of God that He is, couldn't just step in and take away their freedom of choice and turn them into robots. But they didn't understand this, so they abused their freedom and did their thing. Their women departed from the Creator's pattern for the sexes and engaged with other women in all kinds of unnatural acts.

27. Their men were no different. They went against the Creator's design for the sexes and lusted after other men. Yes, men were having sex with men and then reaping in themselves the results of this willful disregard of God's plan.

28. Because they didn't recognize God as their Creator and that they were made to be like Him, the result was that their minds became twisted in their thinking and they ended up doing all sorts of things

people shouldn't do.

29. Their lifestyle was filled with all kind of wrong-doings, such as sexual abuse, perverseness, jealousy, maliciousness, greed, arguments, dishonesty, hatred, and even murder.

30. They would spread rumors, gossip, fight, despise others, and even hate God. They became proud, constantly going around bragging, always inventing some new evil thing to do, and thinking nothing of turning against their own parents.

31. They have no conscience left, always signing agreements without ever intending to keep them, having no real love for anyone but themselves, and being unkind and totally pitiless.

32. They know God's natural laws, and they know that those who live contrary to them don't have the right to go on polluting nature or their own bodies. Nevertheless, they not only continue to do the things we just mentioned, but also honor and applaud those who do them.

CHAPTER 2

1. **Now** those of you who are Jews, don't be in a hurry to judge the Gentiles. You have no right to judge them and then turn around and make excuses for doing some of the same thing. If you set yourself up as their judge and condemn what they're doing, and then do the same, you're also judging yourself.

2. One thing we know for sure, if we don't know anything else, that God does not approve of perverse behavior in anyone, no matter who he is.

3. Do you really think that if you set yourself up as judge and then do some of these same things that you'll escape the consequences of sin and God's judgment?

4. What are you saying about your attitude toward God by the life that you're living? Aren't you showing contempt for His goodness, His kindness, and His patience with you? Don't you know that a proper appreciation of God's graciousness and kindness will lead you to repentance and to a change of life?

5. But if you stubbornly persist in doing your thing, as they do, you're just storing up painful consequences for your-

self. If your sins don't catch up with you in this life, they will in the end when God will have no choice but to rid this world of people who sin, no matter how painful this act will be for Him.

6. At that time, everyone will reap the consequences of what he has done in this life.

7. Those who courageously lived as they should no matter what the cost, and sought to bring glory and honor to God, and valued eternal life for themselves and others, will be given immortality.

8. But those who stubbornly cling to their own ways in the face of the truth about God, and who don't care about what's right, will reap the consequences of sin. The final results will hit them like the sudden coming of an angry hurricane.

9. Everyone who lives to do his own thing will eventually reap anguish of heart and soul whether he's a Jew or a Greek.

10. But glory and honor and peace will come to everyone who wants to do what is right, and again it doesn't matter whether he's a Jew or a Greek.

11. God makes no difference between people and gives no preference to one person over another.

12. This means that those who live outside the sphere of the written law will not be judged by reference to the written law. However, all who have sinned with a clear knowledge of the written law will indeed be held responsible by the written law.

13. Having a knowledge of the Scriptures does not mean that a man is right with God, but doing what is right is what counts.

14. There are Gentiles who do what the written law says, even though they've never heard it. They live out the principles of the law, even though they don't know the law.

15. They give evidence that the principles of the law are written in their hearts because their consciences are guided by God. These kind of people carefully weigh everything they do, to see whether it's right or not.

16. Now when God decides to close up this world's history, He'll evaluate people's

lives by the way Christ lived. His life was just as we described it to you when we shared with you the good news of salvation.

17. But those of you who call yourself Jews and feel that you're secure because you know the Scriptures so well and brag about your special relationship with God, you had better think again.

18. You claim to know His will and how to live right because of the special revelation God has given you;

19. and furthermore, you are confident that you have been chosen to be a guide to those who are spiritually blind, to be a light to those who are walking in darkness,

20. and to teach the ignorant and those newly come to the faith because you have the truth right there in the Scriptures.

21. You who make these claims for yourselves as religious teachers and are teaching others, have you ever thought about teaching yourself something? You who claim to be called to the ministry and to preach to people that they shouldn't steal, do you steal? Are you being as honest as you should be?

22. You might tell people not to commit adultery, but how about you? Is your own life pure? You can't stand it when you see people worshiping idols, but how about you? What are you worshiping? Aren't you dishonoring God if you worship His Temple instead of worshiping Him?

23. So you pride yourself in knowing the Scriptures, yet if you do what the Scriptures tell you not to do, isn't that dishonoring God?

24. It's just as Isaiah said, "The Gentiles have little respect for God because of the way you live."

25. Circumcision or any other religious rite has meaning only if God's people live in harmony with the Scriptures, but if they don't, then circumcision or any other religious practices mean nothing.

26. Now if this is true, then isn't the opposite also true, that people who are not circumcised, yet who do what is right and just, will be accepted by God as if they were circumcised?

27. And if this is so, won't people who are uncircumcised, yet who do what is right and just, judge those who are circumcised?

28. Thus, a person is not a real Jew simply because he's been circumcised on the outside. His circumcision must change his heart.

29. A person is a real Jew if he's been cut on the inside, that is, if his heart has been circumcised, not just his foreskin. A real Jew is more interested in God's approval than he is in man's adulation.

CHAPTER 3

1. You say to me, "If that's the case, what advantage is there in being a Jew? What's so special about being God's people and being circumcised and carefully following all our other religious practices, if this gives us no advantage?"

2. The advantages we have are many. First of all, God put His trust in us by committing to us His written revelation.

3. However, some of us did not prove trustworthy. But does that make God's revelation useless?

4. Certainly not! What God says is always useful and can be trusted no matter what some men might say or do. Men can lie, but God cannot. As David said in the Psalms, "God's words will be found to be true and will vindicate the rightness of His cause."

5. Some might even argue that our terrible wickedness compared with God's goodness shows how great God's love is. If that's the case, then to be consistent, isn't He being unjust to be displeased with our wickedness? (I'm just using human logic to make my point.)

6. Certainly not! Such reasoning is absolutely ridiculous. If what a person does, does not matter, since it shows how great God's love is, then how can God hold anyone accountable for what he does?

7. You see, the logic of their argument ends up to be something like this: If through my sinful life God's grace is made to look even greater, why am I held guilty and judged to be a sinner?

8. Some have reported that I've said that. According to them, I'm supposed to

have said, "Let's sin, so God can look good as the Great Forgiver!" They've twisted what I've said about grace, and their condemnation is just.

9. So we ask the question again: Are we Jews any better off than anyone else? In one sense, not at all, because we have just proved to you that both Jews and Gentiles are in the grips of sin, and that includes us.

10. As stated in the Scriptures: "No one can be exonerated for being naturally righteous, no, not even one.

11. There is not one person who understands the depth of the sin problem, and who can honestly worship God without admitting his sinfulness.

12. All have gone wrong. No one is without sin. There is not one who is totally good.

13. Men's mouths are like death traps. Their tongues rattle off nothing but deceit, and their lips drip with the venom of serpents.

14. They curse and think nothing of it; hearts are full of anger and bitterness.

15. They kill at the drop of a hat, and their conscience doesn't even bother them.

16. They leave destruction and misery behind without blinking an eye.

17. Peace is something they don't know.

18. Worst of all, they don't even know what it means to respect God and to repent of their sins."

19. Now we all know that what the law says is true, and also that the above passages are talking to those to whom God has given His law. And if that's the case, and it is, then every argument is stopped and everyone in the whole world is seen as guilty before God.

20. No human being alive can ever be justified in God's sight by keeping the law. For the law tell us what sin is, that's all it does.

21. **Now** God has revealed a Source of Righteousness that is apart from keeping the law, and all the Scriptures bear witness to this fact.

22. This Source is the righteousness of God's own Son, and God offers this righteousness to everyone who by faith in Jesus Christ claims it as his own; and I do mean

everyone, for God is never partial.

23. All of us have sinned and continue to fall short of God's righteousness.

24. But because of His graciousness, we are acquitted before the law and can unashamedly stand up in the presence of the whole universe as being God's people, because Jesus Christ has paid the price for our sins.

25. God sent Jesus into the world, and by the shedding of His blood, Jesus stands between us and the condemnation to be administered by the law. This demonstrates God's justice and mercy. We see this also in His longsuffering with sinful man when He did not carry out the penalty of the law, but showed him mercy.

26. I want to emphasize again that in Jesus Christ, God demonstrated to the world the kind of compassionate Person He is, and that He has the right to take to heaven anyone who accepts Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord.

27. So in the face of all of this, what do we have to brag about? There's no room in all of this for our own accomplishments. If we do want to boast, what should we boast about? Our knowledge of Scripture? Should we boast about our religious works? In the light of everything we've said, the very thought of doing so is an insult to God. The only way we can stand before the universe and justly claim to be God's people is if we have chosen to walk the road of faith.

28. There is no other conclusion to be reached than that a person can stand before the universe only because he has put his total confidence in God and not in himself, nor in the precepts of the law that he was able to keep.

29. Now is this offer of righteousness by God for the Jews only? Isn't it also for the Gentiles? Yes, since there is only one God, there is only one way to righteousness for everyone!

30. God is not two-faced; His offer is extended to people everywhere, whether they're Jews or not, and this is done only on the basis of their faith in Him.

31. Since we believe that there is only one God, and that righteousness is by faith and not by works, does this then give us

license to live without regard to the written law as you accuse me of saying? Can we rightfully ignore God's law because we trust in what He has done for us? Certainly not! The opposite is true. As never before, we live by what is written.

CHAPTER 4

1. **Now** what about father Abraham? How does his life fit into this theological picture?

2. Well, the same rule applies to him. If he could stand blameless before the universe on the basis of what he did, then he would have something to boast about, but he couldn't do this, not in the presence of a holy God, that's for sure.

3. What does the Scripture say about Abraham? It says that he trusted God and had total confidence in Him, and for this God considered him a great and righteous man.

4. Now a person who works for God's acceptance, as if he's trying to pay off a debt, is not doing so in response to God's offer of salvation.

5. On the other hand, the person who does work, but not for that reason, and puts his complete trust and confidence in God's acceptance of him through Christ is considered a righteous man.

6. David says the same when he describes the happiness of the man whom God accepts as being righteous without that man having worked for it.

7. David says, "Happy are the people whose sins are forgiven.

8. Happy is the man whose sins are not held against him."

9. Can this happiness be experienced only if a man has undergone the ritual of circumcision? Or can those who are not circumcised experience this, too? We just said that Abraham's trust and confidence in God was enough for him to be considered righteous. We conclude, then, that faith in God was credited to him as righteousness.

10. When did this happen to Abraham? Was it before he was circumcised or after? It was before he was circumcised, not after.

11. He was circumcised as a sign of his

relationship with God and of his confidence in Him, which he had before he was circumcised. It was this that made Abraham the spiritual father of everyone who has this same confidence in God, even though they are not circumcised. Therefore, they also can be said to be righteous and the children of Abraham just as much as we are.

12. This means that Abraham's circumcision can be spiritually credited to those who are not circumcised because they have the same confidence in God that he did when he was not circumcised.

13. Now when God promised Abraham that he would inherit the world, this promise was not given to him and his descendants because they kept all the ceremonial laws or had such a great knowledge of the Scriptures, which weren't even written yet. But the promise was given to them on the basis of their trust and confidence in God.

14. If only those who are ritually obedient and who have a knowledge of the law are chosen as heirs to inherit this world, then it doesn't make any difference whether you trust God or not. This makes God's promise to Abraham meaningless.

15. Religious instructions of any kind, no matter how perfectly given and kept, cannot solve the problem of sin, but can only point out what sin is. And if people are not told what sin is and what they're doing wrong, how can God turn around and hold them accountable for what they haven't been told or for what they don't know? That would make God unjust. But the law shows us our need of grace.

16. That's why the solution to our sinful lives depends on grace. And the promise made to Abraham continues to rest on God's grace and not on man's works, and that way salvation can be guaranteed to us and to all Abraham's descendants. This includes not only Jews but also Gentiles. It includes all who have the same confidence in God that Abraham had. This is what makes Abraham the spiritual father of all those who trust God and believe what He says.

17. The Scriptures themselves confirm this when it tells us that God said to Abraham, "I have made you to be the father of

many nationalities." And this promise was given to Abraham because he had confidence in God that He would raise the dead; and that if He had to, He could create a whole new world to keep His promise.

18. When all looked hopeless to Abraham because he had no heir, he was still hopeful and confident that he would be the father of many nationalities because God promised that to him. Abraham never forgot how God asked him to look at the stars and then said, "That's how numerous your descendants will be."

19. He still believed what God said, even though he and Sarah were much too old to have children. After all, Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah had long ago gone through the change of life.

20. In the face of all of this, and even though he had tried to solve the problem himself by fathering Ishmael through Hagar, Abraham's faith still testified to the fact that he was holding on to the promise. And as Abraham continued to listen to God who made the promise, his own faith continued to grow even stronger.

21. Abraham never doubted that God would keep His promise to him and his descendants.

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23. This experience of Abraham with God was not recorded just to honor him.

24. It was recorded for us and for all who have the same confidence in God that Abraham had. And God demonstrated His power to carry out His promise when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

25. Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins and He was raised for our justification so that we might be put right with God, and have a right standing before the universe.

CHAPTER 5

1. And now that we have been put right with God, what do we have that others do not have? To begin with, we who are justified by faith in God are at peace with Him. We see how much He loves us by looking at the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. It was the Lord Jesus who made it possible for us to trust God's love by what

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2. It was the Lord Jesus who made it possible for us to trust God's love by what

He did for us. Therefore, we are covered by God's grace and are always hopeful and joyful in our God. Also, we rejoice because we have the hope of sharing in God's glory.

3. More than that, we even rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that our sufferings contribute to spiritual growth and endurance.

4. And spiritual endurance produces a tested character. In turn, a tested character gives birth to unshakable hope.

5. With such hope we will never be without joy, because God's love has overflowed into our hearts. That is, the love we have for Him came into our hearts as a gift from the Holy Spirit.

6. Remember that the Lord Jesus Christ came to die for us while you and I were still sinners and completely helpless to do anything about being righteous.

7. Now a person would hardly volunteer to give his life to save some man who is a great sinner, but you might find someone who would dare to risk his life for the sake of a good man.

8. But God showed that He loved us by sending his Son to die for us while we were His enemies. It was then that the Lord Jesus Christ came and died for us.

9. Now, since Jesus came and atoned for our sins by His blood, thus giving us a right standing with God, much more sure then is our rescue from the processes of evil which end in destruction.

10. If while we were God's enemies and our natures were still rebellious, God loved us and sent His Son to die for us--the result being that we were reconciled to Him--how much more eager God must now be to save us from the processes of evil through His resurrected Son.

11. And finally, we rejoice in God Himself because of the kind of Person He has shown Himself to be through the Lord Jesus Christ. And, because of Christ, we have been made one with God.

12. **Now** this relationship we have with God is life-giving. It's true that all of us are related to Adam and that, because of his sin, rebellion and death were passed on to us and spread around the whole world. Besides this, each one of us has

personally sinned and is guilty.

13. So sin and its results were in the world before the written law was even given. But sin, as a serious offense against God and man, is not held against a person if he does not know the law.

14. Nevertheless, the fact is that people died, beginning with Adam, all the way down to the time of Moses. And the results of sin with its consequence of death touched even those who did not sin against a direct command as Adam did. So death passed on all men as a result of Adam's sin. Now in one sense, Adam foreshadows Christ, but what a contrast there is between them.

15. The first contrast is seen in the fact that the effects of Adam's sin and the effects of Christ's free gift of salvation are not passed along to us the same way. So we see a difference, but we also see a similarity. And the similarity is this: if it's true that one human being's sin can pass death on to all of us, then isn't it reasonable to assume that the free gift of life which belongs to another Human Being, namely Jesus Christ, can also be passed on to all of us?

16. Here is another difference: Adam's sin brought death to all. Even Abraham had to die. But through God's gracious gift, life is passed on to us from the Lord Jesus Christ, who Himself died but is now alive. This gift is offered to anyone, no matter how often he has sinned, and it is the acceptance of this gift that gives him a standing before God and the universe.

17. Therefore, if by the means of one man's sin, death was able to reign over the whole world, how much more then, by means of an abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness freely offered to all through another Man's sinlessness, will life reign over the whole world, and that Man is Jesus Christ.

18. As certain as death comes to everyone because of one man's sinful act, so acquittal and life are offered to all with the same certainty because of one Man's righteous deed, that is, because of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

19. If by one man's disobedience many received the status of sinners, then by one

Man's obedience many will receive the status of being right with God!

20. Therefore, the law was given so that men could understand more clearly what sin entails. The result of this is that men now realize that their trespasses are more serious than they had thought. And as they realize the enormity of their sin, they are also aware of the abundance of grace that more than covers their sins.

21. Just as the reign of sin brings death into the world through one trespass, so the reign of grace brings eternal life into the world through the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 6

1. **Now** what should we say after all of this? Should we purposely continue sinning so that the goodness of God and His graciousness can look even better?

2. God forbid that we should even be tempted to think that way. How can we, who are dead when it comes to temptation and sinning, turn around and purposely sin?

3. Don't you know that those of us who were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ have admitted that He came to die for us?

4. If by our baptism we experientially died with Him, then, just as Christ was raised from the dead to God's glory, we also should live to God's glory.

5. This is true because, if we experientially died with Him when we were baptized, then also we were experientially raised with Him when we came up out of the baptismal waters.

6. If our old self was crucified and died with Him and the body that was once in service to sin is dead, how can we possibly think of putting our bodies back into that kind of service?

7. A person who is dead to serving sin is set free from the power of sin.

8. And if our old sinful self died and rose with Christ, then we should think of living as Christ did.

9. We know that Christ was raised from the dead and that He'll never have to die again because death has no control over Him any more.

10. When Christ died, He died like a sin offering, once and for all. But He's been resurrected and now He lives forever to the glory of God.

11. That's how you should see yourselves. As far as sin is concerned, you're dead, but in the eyes of God, you're alive for Him in Christ Jesus.

12. So don't let sin get a hold on you, thinking that you have to do what it prompts you to do.

13. Don't give in and let your body become a tool in the hands of sin, but choose to serve God as people should who have been rescued from death and given another chance. Therefore, your body should serve God to do what is right.

14. Sin can't make you do something you don't want to do, because you're no longer controlled by sin, nor are you willing slaves to a law that can't give you life. You now live under the rule of freedom and grace.

15. What then should we do in this new realm of freedom? Are we to go ahead and sin now because we no longer keep the law as a means of salvation, but are saved by grace? God forbid that we should even think of doing such a thing!

16. Don't you know that you become the slave of the person to whom you turn over the control of your life? If you turn over your life to the control of sin, it will eventually kill you. If you turn over your life to the control of right-doing, it will lead you to eternal life.

17. I thank God that, though at one time you were under the control of sin, you've changed and with all sincerity of heart decided to live a totally different life.

18. So now being free from the controlling power of sin, you're willingly controlled by right-doing.

19. I'm speaking in human terms because of the limitations of human understanding and the weaknesses of the flesh. But I know also that, just as you once continually yielded to sin and went from bad to worse, you now need to continually yield to Christ and His righteousness and respond to that which is good.

20. Now while you were a slave to the old master sin, you felt no obligation to

Christ and His righteousness.

21. Let me ask you, what would have happened to you as result of the sinful things you did of which you're now so ashamed? All these things would have taken you to death and your final extinction!

22. But now the tables are turned. You have no more obligation to the old master sin. You have become willing servants of Jesus Christ, and this kind of response to God's grace will guarantee for you eternal life.

23. We know that the consequence of sinning is death, but we also know that, God's gift to us is eternal life as seen in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 7

1. **Dear** brothers, you know that the law has jurisdiction over a man only as long as he lives. Once he's dead, he can no longer be prosecuted.

2. Let me illustrate what I mean by that. The Scriptures tell us that a married woman is tied to her husband as long as he lives, but that when he dies, she doesn't have to continue to be faithful to him by staying single the rest of her life. She can get married again, and when she does, she's not an adulteress.

3. However, if she would move out of the house and live with another man while her husband is still living, she would be considered an adulteress. But, as we said, if her husband is dead, she is free from the law that bound her to him. She can marry again if she wants to, and no one will think anything about it, even though she's living with a different man from the one she was married to first.

4. Now spiritually speaking, your old life died with Christ when He was crucified. So you can no longer be prosecuted for your former way of life. However, you not only died with Him, but you were raised with Him and so you have a new life and are free to marry. And you have chosen to marry Him, who was also raised from the dead, and this new marriage is already bearing fruit.

5. Now this new arrangement applies to all of us. When we were living accord-

ing to the dictates of our old sinful human natures, our attitude was such that the requirements of the law as a means of salvation made our hearts even harder. And this legalistic attitude led us further and further along the path of death.

6. But now we're delivered from seeing the requirements of the law as a means of salvation, because we're dead to the idea that salvation can be gained by works. We are no longer bound to a written code. On the contrary, we serve God willingly and joyously with a new life governed by the Holy Spirit.

7. What shall we say in light of all this? Is the law such a sinful thing that we're eager to escape from it? Absolutely not! I wouldn't have understood sin within myself if the law hadn't pointed it out to me. You see, I never would have known how sinful it was to lust after my own success, even if it was being zealous for God. The tenth commandment made it very plain when it said, "Thou shalt not covet."

8. It was this commandment that awakened in me an awareness of my sinful human nature. Self-interest proved to be the very essence of my being.

9. I considered myself a normal, law-abiding person, but when I came to understand the true meaning of the tenth commandment, and how it measures my motives, sin became a very real thing, and I realized that in the eyes of God's law, I was as good as dead.

10. So, the very law which originally promised life on condition of obedience proved to be for me in my sinful human nature a law of death.

11. Sin had used the law as a cover to get at me. It was sin that blinded me to the high standard of the law, and in that sense, it used the law to deceive me. So sin didn't love me, but used the law to kill me.

12. I want you to be sure to understand one thing. God is holy, and therefore His commandments are holy, just, and good.

13. How then did that which I knew to be for my good end up condemning me? Well, it didn't. And God forbid that we should think it did. It was given to help me. You see, it was sin, that is, the whole

system of evil, which has been part of our human nature since the fall of man, that condemned me and killed me. It did this by perverting and twisting all the laws that were given for my good. In fact, because sin perverted and twisted the holy, just, and good commandments of God from their purpose, we can see that nothing is sacred to sin, not even the holy law of God. Therefore, from this alone we know how totally evil sin really is.

14. Clearly then, the law as given by God has not only a religious function, but also a spiritual one. God's law is good. The problem is with my sinful human nature.

15. So what I really wanted to do with my life, I didn't do, but ended up doing what I really hated. I wanted to serve God and ended up serving myself and didn't even know it.

16. And if at any time I do what I really don't want to do, then I'm admitting that what the law says about me is right.

17. Yet I also realize that my problem isn't really me, but my sin-loving nature.

18. This means that there is nothing good in my nature that can be trusted—that is, in my sinful human nature—because, no matter how much I want to do what is right and to do it for the right reason, and no matter how hard I try, I'm never really able to be as good and to live as unselfishly as I really want.

19. So to be as good as I really want to be, I'm not, and the evil motives that I hate at times still deceive me and make me do what I don't want to do. And so I find myself doing what isn't right, or doing what is right, but for the wrong reason.

20. Now if I do what deep down I don't really want to do, I'm not really the one wanting to do it, but it's my sinful human nature that wants to do it and that's pushing me into doing it.

21. I'm trapped. But I can't excuse my sinning because of my sinful nature. I'm still held responsible for my actions and for what I do. So I find it to be a law of life that in my present human state, when I really want to do right, sin is still there and keeps pushing itself on me.

22. I really appreciate having God's law

to guide me, because deep inside of me I long to be holy and to live an unselfish life.

23. But as I said before, deep inside of me a sinful human nature is also there and it is constantly present, no matter how I set my mind against it. It's strong enough even to overcome my innermost longings to always be good.

24. How wretched can a person's existence be? How can I get out of this dilemma that I'm caught in? I'm living in a body that is taking me to eternal death.

25. But thanks be to God, this problem has not been left for me to solve, and for that I'm eternally grateful. It has been solved for me by the Lord Jesus Christ! Therefore, deep in my heart, I appreciate and ardently keep the law of God because of what Christ did for me, but because of my sinful human nature, I at times still end up doing wrong things and even right things from wrong motives. Nevertheless with my mind I will continue to serve the law of God, even though my human nature serves the law of sin.

CHAPTER 8

1. Therefore, there is no longer any condemnation of me, but only of my sinful human nature, for I am hid in Christ and no longer pattern my life according to my sinful self, but according to my new life in the Spirit.

2. There is now a new nature working in me besides the nature of sin, giving me a totally different motive for serving God than I had before. This new nature is a gift from the Holy Spirit, who through Christ has freed me from the control of sin, which always stands ready to deceive me and put me on the road to death.

3. God's instructions, no matter how well I know them and no matter how holy and good they are, are powerless to save me from my sinful self. But what God's instructions cannot do, God by sending His Son, who came and took on weakened human nature, demonstrated that by the power of the Holy Spirit, human beings can overcome the power of sin.

4. And it disproved any notion that there is no out for human beings except to be slaves to their own sinful human na-

tures. The Lord Jesus did this, not just to demonstrate what He could do, but to give us an example of how to live. He doesn't want us to be controlled by sin, but by the Holy Spirit.

5. This means that human beings who try to live lives of right-doing by their own power are doing what their perverted human nature is telling them to do. But those who have tasted the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives will live the kind of lives the Holy Spirit wants them to live.

6. To act on the motives of our inherited human nature will only lead to death, but to act on what the Holy Spirit tells us to do will bring life and peace of soul.

7. The thought processes of fallen man do not lead him to depend on God, because those thought processes are not in harmony with God's law and never will be.

8. Those who live for themselves can never have a redemptive fellowship with God.

9. But you no longer operate in the sphere of the flesh, but in the sphere of the Spirit, that is, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. And if a person does not have Christ's Spirit dwelling inside of him, he doesn't really belong to Christ.

10. But if Christ through His Spirit is in you, even though your bodies are aging and will one day die, your inner man is alive because of righteousness, that is, because of God's free gift and your acceptance of it.

11. Now I'm sure you can see the logic of all this. If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead dwells in you, then He who raised Christ from the dead will also be able to raise you from the dead through the Holy Spirit, who was already in you when you were still alive.

12. Therefore, we are not obligated to give in to our perverted human nature and to do what it tells us to do.

13. If we do, we'll die. But if by the power of the Holy Spirit we do what is right and do it for the right reasons, even though it doesn't feel natural for us to do it, we will be given eternal life.

14. Those who submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit are already sons of God.

15. So you don't have to live with the same attitude of uncertainty and worry about your salvation. You have been given the Holy Spirit, which means that God has already adopted you and claimed you as His own. You can truly call Him Father, that is, our Father.

16. When we call God, Father, that is, our Father, it is the Holy Spirit Himself who is joining with our spirit and witnessing to the fact that we are the children of God.

17. Now if we're God's children, then we're His heirs, and if we're His heirs, then we're fellow-heirs with Christ, provided that we share in the struggles and suffering which He also had living out a righteous life in a sinful world. And if we share His sufferings, we will also share His glory.

18. So the self-denial and the temptations and sufferings that we go through in this world, because we're Christians, are not even worth mentioning when we compare them with the glory that God will bestow on us and of which we already have a taste.

19. In fact, creation itself is waiting for our full restoration as heirs and sons of God, which is our rightful place.

20. All creation has suffered because of man's rebellion and sin. Nature did not choose to rebel, yet God allowed it to suffer, and now it exists in hope of the restoration just as we do.

21. Indeed, nature itself will be delivered from the effects of sin and will once again breathe free and enjoy God's liberty, as all of creation will.

22. Right now, all creation is in pain and has been groaning under the load of sin since the beginning of our rebellion.

23. And not only is nature with all its creatures groaning, but also we who have tasted the creative power of the Holy Spirit are groaning inside and waiting for the full realization of our adoption and the gift of a new body.

24. Looking forward to our restoration, hope becomes a vital part of our lives. You see, if God would answer all our prayers and give us everything we ask for now, then we would have nothing to anticipate,

nothing to look forward to, nothing to hope for.

25. But if we look forward to what we don't have, then hope becomes a vital part of our lives and helps us to develop endurance, as it tests our confidence in God and our acceptance of His promise.

26. And the Holy Spirit is right here with us to help us in our weak moments, because we don't even know what we should pray first, and when we think we do, we don't know how to say it right. But the Holy Spirit takes our deepest emotions and longings as we try to put them into words, and He puts them into the beautiful language of heaven and talks to God for us as if we were before God in person.

27. Actually, God knows our hearts and knows what the Holy Spirit is going to say even before He reshapes our requests and puts them in words in harmony with God's good will for us.

28. So we know that God will make everything that happens to us in this life come out to our eventual good, as long as we love Him and trust Him and remain true to the purpose for which He called us.

29. You see, God knows everyone born into this world. It was His plan that everyone be like His Son. This then makes His Son the first-born in God's new family, because all the rest of us received our life through Him and this, in turn, makes us brothers and sisters.

30. And because God planned everyone to be like His Son, He gave everyone an opportunity to be so. Therefore, whoever accepts this opportunity, He justifies; and those whom He justifies, He intends to glorify.

31. When we think about all this, what can we say? If God is for us, who can be against us!

32. If God loved us so much that He was willing to let His own Son suffer as He did, wouldn't He be willing to do anything else for us to help us?

33. Then what right do we have to be against anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, who has responded to God's love and to whom God has already given the Holy Spirit? It's God's doing, and we know that God is just.

34. And if God is just, which He is, who dares to condemn what He does and dares to say that God is wrong? It was God's own Son who died, who rose again, and who is now on the right hand of God as our human representative and as a witness to everyone of our status among the peoples of the universe.

35. So who can come between us and God? What is it that has the power to dim our love for Christ? Should we let troubles come between us and Christ? Should we let hardships, persecutions, hunger, poverty, danger, or death come between us? Absolutely not!

36. As the Scripture says, "For your sake, oh, Lord, we are willing to look death in the face every day of our lives. And we are regarded by the world as sheep to be slaughtered."

37. It's because of Christ's love for us that we are able, not only to go through these types of things, but even to overcome them.

38. I not only believe, but am convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that nothing can force its way between us and God. It doesn't matter whether it's life, death, angels, earthly powers, forces in the universe, things present, things to come,

39. the world above, the world below, or any living being you can name, because God's love for us has been made visible to the whole universe in Jesus Christ our Lord. And so be it.

CHAPTER 9

1. **Now** I want to tell you truthfully what I'm concerned about. I'll not lie to you, because both my conscience and the Holy Spirit are my witnesses and certify to me that what I'm telling you is true.

2. I'm continually grieving, so that at times my heart is so heavy it feels as if it weighs a ton.

3. I'm even willing to be separated from Christ forever and face the consequences of all that would happen to me for the sake of my kinsmen and my Jewish brethren.

4. They are Israelites and have the privilege of being God's adopted people to whom He revealed His majesty and

power. They are the people with whom God made a unique covenant agreement; to whom He gave special instructions and His law; to whom He entrusted the keeping of His own Sanctuary; and to whom He gave the promises.

5. The great patriarchs of history are their fathers. Jesus Christ Himself became a Jew, one of them, and as a Jew, He is now in charge of the whole universe and will forever be seated on the right hand of God forever. So be it!

6. Now I don't want you to run away with the idea that God's word has failed. We need to recognize that not everyone who is a biological descendant of Israel belongs to Israel.

7. Being a descendant of Abraham does not necessarily mean that everyone born as a Jew is a child of God. The real connection with Abraham comes through Isaac. It is through him that Abraham's seed was to continue, not through anyone else.

8. What I'm saying is this. The biological descendants of Abraham are not automatically God's children. They have to individually experience the life-giving power of God's promise just as Abraham and Sarah did.

9. Sarah experienced this life-giving power when God said to her, "At this time next year you will give birth to a baby boy."

10. Again God's power was seen when He responded to Isaac's plea, and Rebecca conceived and became pregnant.

11. Now we know that unborn children have done nothing good or bad for one to be chosen above another because of his or her goodness. So if one of them is selected by God to do something special for Him, he is not chosen because he earned that distinction, but because he was selected by God in spite of himself. It's that way because of God's graciousness and not because of any good thing the child did before it was even born.

12. On this same basis, God told Rebecca, "The second born will be honored above the first born," which is contrary to all custom.

13. That's what God makes clear, when

in the Scriptures He says, "I have chosen Jacob, the younger one over Esau, the older one."

14. Now what should we say to that? Was God being unfair? Was God playing favorites? That's absurd!

15. God even told Moses, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful."

16. What God is trying to say is that He is not obligated to anyone. His decisions are freely and lovingly made. They are not based on what man wants, nor on his performance, but squarely on God's personal choice.

17. Notice what God said about Pharaoh, "I have permitted you to become king in order to show others my power and to spread my name throughout the world."

18. From what we've just said, we can see that God is in charge of everything, and that He decides in a given situation whether to display His mercy or His power.

19. So now you're going to say to me, "Why then is God finding fault with us if He's chosen us? He's going to do what He wants anyway, no matter what we do. It doesn't look as if we have anything to say about our future, so why even try?"

20. Now that's not the way to respond to God. A clay pot doesn't challenge the master potter and say to him, "Why did you make me like this?"

21. Is it the clay that decides what kind of a pot it will be, or is it the potter who decides? Doesn't the man who makes the pots have a right to decide which pots to make? Doesn't he make one pot for special use and another pot for more ordinary use, whatever he feels is needed?

22. So it is with God and us. If He chooses to use a certain situation to show His power and another situation to show His mercy, that's His right. He isn't obligated to get our consent before He does anything. In Pharaoh's case, when God wanted to reveal His power, He was extremely patient with Pharaoh because He knew ahead of time what the eventual outcome of Pharaoh's stubbornness would be.

23. When He wanted to reveal His love

to the world, He chose to do it through us, all the while having in mind our future glory and happiness.

24. And He has decided not to restrict His love just to the descendants of Abraham, but to include the Gentiles as well.

25. As He said through the prophet Hosea, "I will invite others to be part of my people, even though they were not delivered from Egypt. I will love them, too, and show them that they were not forgotten or rejected.

26. It will happen that even though they were told by some, 'You are not God's people,' they will be told by others, 'You also are the sons of the living God.'"

27. Notice what Isaiah said about us, "Even though the Lord Almighty gave us descendants and promised us that we would be as numerous as the sands of the sea, only a comparatively small remnant of us will be saved.

28. God has decided to sift His people and His decision is final."

29. As Isaiah points out in another place, "If God had not worked for us to leave us some descendants, our future would look no different than what happened to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah."

30. So what do we conclude from all of this? Well, we conclude that the Gentiles, who had not been living by our moral standards, have been accepted by God as if they had lived by them. This was done by God for them because, when they learned about Him, they put their trust in Him as Abraham did.

31. But the descendants of Abraham who tried to live by the law to make themselves acceptable to God never did reach this point of acceptance.

32. Why? They didn't put their trust in God, but trusted in what they could do. What happened was that they stumbled over the very act of God given to help them.

33. As the Scriptures says, "I am placing in the streets of Zion a Stone which men will be ashamed of and a Rock over which their faith will stumble. But whoever stands on this Rock and trusts to put his whole weight on it will never be sorry

that he did it." And that Rock is Jesus Christ!

CHAPTER 10

1. **Brothers**, I want to tell you from the depths of my heart that my most earnest desire and my constant prayer to God is that Israel be saved.

2. I'm the first one to acknowledge Israel's utter commitment to God, but their zeal is not always balanced with wisdom and insight.

3. Many of them don't seem to understand what God has done to give us a right standing before Him and before the other beings throughout the universe. They are constantly trying to earn their way into heaven without depending on what God has already done for them.

4. Christ's life and sacrifice should make it evident that law-keeping is not a means of salvation. Such attempts as they make to be saved by the law are futile. Righteousness comes from Christ, not from law-keeping.

5. As Moses said, "The man whose righteousness is rooted in the law will have to live or die on the basis of what the law says."

6. But he knew that our title to heaven is a matter of faith and trust in God. It is not in what we can do for ourselves, but in what God has done for us. That's why Moses said to the people, "Don't be tempted in your heart to think that God won't come down from heaven until you first work your way up to heaven.

7. Or, don't be tempted to think that God won't come and raise you from the dead unless you first work your way out of the depths of your sin."

8. Then he added, "No, God is right here with you. He's decided to write His word in your heart, so it's there now. And it's not that hard to understand and to do what it says." And that's the same word of faith I'm preaching today.

9. If you acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord and really believe that God raised Him from the dead and that He's your living Lord, you have a saving relationship with God already.

10. Now, faith and trust are matters of

the heart and that's what leads us to Christ and justification. Then you work for God and witness for Him because you're already saved by what He has done for you.

11. That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "Anyone who has faith in God and what He has done will speak up for God."

12. There is no difference between Jews and Greeks. The same salvation principle of faith applies to all. Our Lord is the Lord of all and responds to anyone who calls on Him for help.

13. Again, this is in harmony with the Scriptures when they say, "Everyone who calls on the Lord for help will find the salvation he seeks."

14. Now the question is this: How can people call on the Lord for help if they don't believe that He is? How can they put their trust in the Lord if they've never heard about Him? How can they hear about Him if no one goes and tells them?

15. And who would go and tell them about the Lord and His plan to save them through faith, unless he himself believed it and was commissioned by the Lord to go? That's why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of those who come to bring us good tidings about the Lord and about the good news of salvation."

16. But not everyone in Israel has accepted this good news. That's why Isaiah said, "Lord, no one seems to believe what we're telling them."

17. So faith in God begins with listening to what the Lord has to say, and this includes listening to what the Scriptures tell us about the Lord Jesus Christ.

18. Could it be that they didn't hear and understand the message of God's love? No. They heard it and understood it. The Scriptures told them, "The heavens declare the creative power and love of God. The voice of creation reaches to the far ends of the earth and the word about God is sounded throughout the world."

19. Let me ask the same question again. Could it be that they didn't understand the message of God's saving love? Moses himself answers this question when he spoke for God and said, "I will make you jealous by what I will do for other people,

for those who have not been called as a nation as you have. I will disturb your complacency by speaking to those whom you think have no understanding of the things of God."

20. This same message was later confirmed by Isaiah when he spoke for God and said, "I will be found by those who have no interest in me. I will reveal myself to those who don't even ask about me."

21. But then Isaiah speaks for God about Israel and says, "Every day I've stretched out my hands of love to a disobedient and stubborn people who never admit that they need my help or even seem to want it. They think they can do it all themselves."

CHAPTER 11

1. **Does** this mean that God has forsaken His people and left them to themselves? Of course not! I'm living evidence that this is not so! I'm an Israelite, a direct descendant of Abraham through his great-grandson Benjamin.

2. God hasn't turned His back on the people whom He originally chose and brought out of Egypt. Haven't you read what the Scriptures say about Elijah's concern when he prayed,

3. "Lord, these people have killed your prophets and smashed your altars. And it looks as if I'm the only prophet left, and now they're after me."

4. But what did God say to him? "I still have seven thousand men with their families scattered throughout Israel who are loyal to me and who have not been taken in by the worship of Baal."

5. That's how it still is today. There are those who, in spite of the rejection of Christ by so many in Israel, have accepted Him and are the ones who make up God's people.

6. If salvation is God's gracious gift extended to all, then how can it be restricted to only a few who try to earn it? And if God's salvation, which He does extend to all, is free, then your efforts to save yourselves are meaningless.

7. All through the centuries Israel as a people has not achieved the salvation it's been looking for, but those Israelites who have chosen to accept God's free gift have

experienced His saving power in their lives. And now the other Israelites are jealous and have steeled themselves against the very thing they so desperately need.

8. That's just what the Scriptures say would happen, "God will not interfere with the consequences of their choice as they close their eyes to the truth so as not to see, block their ears to God's word so as not to hear, and then slip into a peaceful spiritual coma where nothing bothers them anymore."

9. And David says, "May their prosperity work against them, may all their plans to make money fail, may they reap the consequences of their actions,

10. may it affect their health, making them prematurely old, may they taste poverty, and may all this happen to them with the hope that it will wake them up to their need of salvation."

11. Does this mean that all Israelites are lost because of their nation's ignorance and blindness? Certainly not! However, because of the nation's rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the full knowledge of God's salvation has already spread among the Gentiles, and hopefully will make Israel jealous, so they too, will accept Christ as Savior and Lord.

12. So Israel's stubbornness has been the means of bringing the full knowledge of God's salvation to the Gentiles sooner than we thought. But just think what would have happened if Israel as a nation would have accepted God's salvation and then taken it to the whole world!

13. Now let me say a word to you who are not Jews, and I want you to listen to me. I'm your appointed apostle and everyone knows it, and I'm not ashamed of it.

14. I want you to know that I'm committed to doing everything I can to motivate my own people to accept Christ, even if I have to make them jealous of you. If that will lead them to Christ and to accept God's salvation, it will have been worth it.

15. If their rejection of God's salvation brought such reconciling power into your lives, just think, what would happen if they would accept Christ? For them it would be like a resurrection from the dead!

16. We all know that if the flour offered to God from the first fruits of the harvest is holy, then so is the bread that comes from it. And if the root system of a tree is good, the branches will be good, too.

17. Now suppose some branches have been broken off from the good olive tree, and you Gentiles, like some wild olive branches, are grafted in among the original ones and flourish. Isn't it because you're nourished from the same root system as the original branches are?

18. So, in the light of this, how can you say that you're better than the original branches? If you start boasting about your own spirituality, don't forget that it's the root system that supports you, not the other way around.

19. You might argue that the old branches were broken off to make room for you.

20. But wait. Why were they broken off? They were broken off because they put their trust in themselves. And the only reason that you're different now from what you were before is that you've put your trust in God for your salvation. So be careful what you say about the original branches, and don't fall into the temptation of thinking that you're better than they are, but be grateful for what God has done for you.

21. Now if God had to cut off the original branches from the good olive tree because they did not produce good fruit, He will not hesitate to do the same to you if you don't produce good fruit.

22. So be sure that you take into consideration not only God's love, but also His justice. He was just in what He did to the original branches, and He was loving and gracious to you by grafting you into a good olive tree. But you'll stay grafted in only if you continue to trust in God's goodness and show your appreciation for what He has done for you. Otherwise you'll have to be pruned away.

23. Also, you need to realize that, if the old branches which were cut off stop trusting in themselves and look to God for salvation, they can be grafted back in. Nothing is impossible with God.

24. All you need to do to understand

this is to look at your own experience. If you could be taken from a wild olive tree whose root system is bad and be grafted into an olive tree whose root system is good and totally different, how much easier it will be for the original branches to be grafted back into the tree from which they were taken.

25. I'm telling you this, my brothers, because I don't want you to be misled about God's ability to save, no matter how mysterious and contrary to natural reason it may seem. Neither do I want you to become conceited and proud of your salvation. Remember that for the time being, some in Israel have chosen to be stubborn, and during this time God brought in a large number of Gentiles to be part of Israel.

26. So, eventually, all who are true Israelites will be saved. As the Lord says, "Out of Zion will the Deliverer of the whole world come and He will also take away Jacob's embarrassment.

27. This is the covenant that I will make with them, when I come to take away their sins."

28. **Now** as far as God's good news is concerned, the Jews as a nation are against it, but this has been to your advantage. However, as far as God's plan for them is concerned, it's the same loving plan He had in the days of their forefathers.

29. God's gift of salvation and His call to accept it has never changed.

30. Just as you were once disobedient to God, but now have received mercy in spite of their failure to carry out His mission,

31. so the same thing can happen to them as happened to you. They, too, can become part of God's people in spite of what you do, but God wants to show His compassion and kindness toward them through what you do for them.

32. From God's standpoint, all of us are by nature rebellious and in need of His kindness and love.

33. Oh, the depth and richness of knowing and understanding the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable and totally incomprehensible to us humans are His decisions and His way of

carrying them out.

34. As Isaiah says, "Who can explain the way God thinks? Or, who dares to think to advise Him how to do things?"

35. As Job says, "Who first convinced God to love us and, therefore, should be rewarded for it?"

36. God is His own Source of wisdom. Everything begins with Him, comes to us because of Him, and returns to Him in thanksgiving and praise. To such a God as ours be glory and power and honor forever. So be it!

CHAPTER 12

1. **Therefore** I plead with you, my brothers, because God loves you and has shown you such compassion, offer yourselves to Him not as dead carcasses in a sacrifice, but as living bodies pulsating with life, holy and pleasing to God. Such a life is the best form of worship that can be rendered to God.

2. Don't conform to the expectations of this world, but set your mind on the Lord and let Him transform you from the inside out. Then show by the way you live that God has accepted you, changed you, and wants everything for you that is good and acceptable and perfect.

3. In the light of the responsibility God has given me to help you, I want to say to each of you in all sincerity that you should never think of yourself as being better than anyone else and that you are the only one who is an honor to God's cause. You need to watch yourself on that point and to look at yourself seriously, because God is the One who has given each of you your particular talents and gifts.

4. The church is something like your own body. It has numerous parts and each part has to carry out its particular function or the body won't perform properly and soon gets sick and dies.

5. So you need to learn to work together as the different parts of your bodies do. You know that each part of your body does not have the same function, nor does it play the same role, as the other parts do. And we want to make up one huge human body for Christ to live in.

6. In the church we have different

responsibilities, depending on what our natural talents are and what spiritual gift or gifts we've been given. If you've been given the gift of proclamation, then you need to do it with confidence, trusting that the Lord will help you.

7. If you've received the gift of pastoral concern, then do that. Or, if you have the gift of teaching and religious instruction, then concentrate on that.

8. If God has given you the gift to counsel and encourage others, do it. If you've been blessed monetarily, then feed the poor and help to support God's cause, but do it with the simplicity and innocence of a child. If you have administrative gifts, take the responsibility seriously. If you've been given the capacity to show kindness and be compassionate to those in need, do it joyfully.

9. Love each other sincerely. Don't do it hypocritically. Turn away from everything that is bad and hold on to what is good.

10. Be kind and courteous to one another as true brothers and sisters in the family of Christ, honoring and respecting each other and giving each other the preference.

11. Don't be lazy, but do your work or your business enthusiastically, just as if the Lord employed you.

12. Let your hope keep your spirits up, hold on to your faith when you're going through troubles, and never stop lifting your mind up to God in prayer.

13. Take care of your brothers and sisters in Christ who lost their employment because of their faith, and don't hesitate to open your home to them if you have to. And don't restrict your kindness just to church members, but be ready to help all who need help, even if you don't know them personally.

14. Ask God to bless those who persecute you. That's right. Ask God to bless them, don't curse them.

15. Be happy with those who are happy and cry with those who are crying.

16. Show the same concern and attitude toward everyone, member and non-member alike. Don't be proud and favor only the rich, but associate with and re-

spect even the poorest of people. Don't keep thinking about how great you are.

17. Don't function from the premise of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth because that can lead to getting even. Do everything openly and honestly for anyone to see.

18. As far as is humanly possible, try to get along with everyone.

19. Dear brothers, never take revenge on someone who has done you wrong, but turn your hostility and frustrations over to God. The Scriptures make it very clear, "I will see that justice is done. I will take care of it," says the Lord.

20. Now according to the Scriptures, your responsibility is this, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he's thirsty, give him something to drink. By doing this to an enemy and by not taking revenge on him yourself, you leave him in the hands of God.

21. So don't let bad people get to you, but overcome the bad things they do to you by doing good things for them.

CHAPTER 13

1. **Also** be sure that you obey the law. And even though you may not agree with the law, it does have a part to play in God's overall plan, to put a restraint on evil and to keep things as peaceful and orderly as possible.

2. So anyone who is against law and order is against what has been put there by God. And if you resist such laws, you may not only find yourself opposing God, but being arrested as a lawbreaker as well.

3. The law does not arrest and punish people who are good, but only those who are bad. You don't have to be afraid of those who rule over you, only if you do evil. So do what's good and you don't have to be afraid.

4. In this sense, law enforcement officers are serving God, because they are put there to arrest and punish those that do evil. So, if you do evil, then you have good reason to be afraid. Remember, God has included human government in His overall plan to help restrain wickedness.

5. That's why the thing to do is to be a good citizen to the best of your ability, not

only to avoid God's displeasure, but in order to maintain a good conscience.

6. And for the same reason we pay taxes, because those who enforce the law are serving God by maintaining law and order and keeping the peace.

7. So give to everyone what rightfully belongs to him, taxes to the tax collectors, custom fees to the custom officials, respect to those in authority, and honor to heads of governments.

8. It's a good practice to pay as you go to avoid all debts, except the debt of loving one another. And he who loves his neighbor is in harmony with God's law.

9. God's commandments say, "Don't commit adultery, don't kill, don't steal, don't be jealous." These and the other commandments, which I don't need to list for you, can all be summarized in this one statement: Love and care about your neighbors as you love and care about yourself.

10. Love doesn't do things to hurt others and that's why loving acts fulfill the requirements of God's law.

11. Considering the times we're living in, it's time for us to wake up, because we might have to suffer persecution and our lives might end sooner than we think. If it was urgent to have a saving relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ when you first heard the gospel, it's that much more urgent now.

12. For some of us the darkness of this world might end sooner than we think, but at the next moment of consciousness, the sunshine of God's morning will break in upon us and we will see Him who loved us face to face. So let's discard anything associated with the darkness of this world, and let's proudly wear the armor which reflects the light of God.

13. Let's conduct ourselves as if standing in broad daylight. Let's not get involved in those things that people like to do in the dark, such as carousing, evil partying, drunkenness, sensuality of all kinds, sexual orgies, fightings, and jealousies.

14. Put on the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and don't do as other people whose constant effort in life seems to be to satisfy the cravings of their sinful human nature.

CHAPTER 14

1. **Now** concerning the one who doesn't know as much as you do about his newly found faith, receive him into your home as a brother, but not for the purpose of arguing about your pet ideas and opinions.

2. Some get hung up on the idea that what they eat and don't eat will affect God's love for them. Others think their salvation isn't affected no matter what they eat.

3. Don't let those who think they can eat almost anything look down on those who are careful about what they eat. The reverse is also true. Don't let those who are careful about what they eat be judgmental about the eating habits of those who are less careful.

4. Don't judge other people's house servants, telling them what to do and what not to do. Each house servant is responsible to the people he works for. He's not responsible to you. God will help him to know what is right and give him strength to live by his convictions, no matter where he works. And this is the way things should be among brothers in the faith. It is God who judges and not you.

5. The same principle of judgment applies to religious festivals. One person thinks he needs to keep every Jewish festival, while someone else thinks it doesn't matter whether he keeps these festivals or not. In things like these, everyone has to follow his own conscience.

6. The main point in all this is whether a person thinks he's honoring God and is grateful for what God has done for him. The same principle applies to what we eat or don't eat. One person eats three meals a day and does it to keep up his strength to honor God and is grateful for what he has. Another person fasts twice a week and also does it to honor God and is grateful for what he has. There is no reason to judge either one of them, for they are both honoring God and are grateful, and that's all that really matters.

7. Now on the other hand, we can't just live to please ourselves and ignore others as if they didn't exist. We can't say that what we do doesn't matter because it isn't hurting anyone. It does matter.

Everything we do in life affects someone else; even the way we die has its influence on others.

8. So don't criticize others. The main thing for all of us to remember while we're still alive is this: Live for the Lord Jesus Christ with all you have, and when the time comes for you to die, do it in such a way as to honor Him again. Then people will know that, whether living or dead, we belong to the Lord.

9. That's why Christ can be rightfully called the Lord of the living as well as the Lord of the dead. He once lived a righteous life for us, died for us, then rose again, and is now living for us in the courts above.

10. So why judge someone because his behavior is not exactly like yours? Why reject him or turn against him? Isn't he your brother? One day all of us will have to stand before the judgment seat of God.

11. As the Scriptures tell us, "'As I live,' says the Lord, 'one day everyone will bow and openly acknowledge that my dealings with mankind have been loving.'"

12. So, then, each one of us will have to answer for ourselves before God.

13. Therefore, let's not be judgmental and critical of each other, but instead let each of us decide that we will never put a stumbling block or any kind of hindrance in the way of a brother.

14. I know, that is, I am personally convinced through my relationship with Jesus Christ, that nothing which the Lord has declared to be food for man is unclean in itself, but it may be considered unclean by some, who for various reasons, think it is unfit to eat.

15. So if a brother feels hurt when he sees you eating what he thinks is unfit to eat, then be kind to him and stop eating it. Don't destroy his faith over an item of diet. Christ died for him, too, you know.

16. Don't make a big point over all this. Otherwise, all the other good things you do will be meaningless and possibly even despised by those who know you.

17. God's kingdom doesn't center in what we eat or don't eat, but it has to do with right-doing, peace, and joy in the Lord through the Holy Spirit.

18. The person who serves Christ and

produces the fruit of the Spirit can be sure that his actions are approved by God and that they will be appreciated by those around him.

19. Therefore, let's choose to do things and talk about things that bring peace and joy, especially those things that build up people's faith in the Lord.

20. To make an issue over food will actually destroy what God is trying to do. Even if certain foods are all right to eat, it's still wrong for the person who feels he can eat them to go around upsetting others just to show off his freedom.

21. It's always best not to eat or drink anything which makes your brother question the genuineness of your religious experience.

22. Whatever you believe about this issue, keep it to yourself. Eat what you feel you can eat and enjoy it, but do it in your own house. And if your conscience doesn't convict you about what you're eating, be grateful and enjoy it.

23. The whole thing is very simple. The man who sincerely questions the fitness of certain foods and then turns around and eats them anyway is doing wrong. His inconsistency will eventually destroy his faith. And whatever destroys faith is sinful.

CHAPTER 15

1. If you think you're spiritually strong, then you ought to have the confidence and humility to help those who you think are weak and faulty, and not use all your time and energy to please yourself.

2. All of us should be encouraging one another as genuine brothers and sisters do, and we should be building each other up.

3. Even Christ didn't live for Himself or keep to Himself. As the Scriptures say, "The insults they will hurl at you will fall on me."

4. And whatever was written for the instruction of the ancients was written for us also. It's from the encouragement which the Scriptures give us that we patiently endure the trials of life and from which we get our hope.

5. May the God who is patient and

who gives courage help you to think and act toward each other as Christ did,

6. so that with one mind and one mouth all of you can talk about how good the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is and how much He loves and cares about everyone.

7. You need to relate to each other in the same way that Christ related to us when He was here and gave us a glimpse of what God Himself is like.

8. Christ came to minister to Israel, not to reject her, as some of us are tempted to do. He came to confirm the truth about God and to show the Israelites that the promises God made to their forefathers He intended to keep.

9. He came to vindicate God in the eyes of the Gentiles also, as the Scriptures say, "I will bring honor to your name among the Gentiles so that they, too, will sing your praise."

10. In another place, the Scriptures say, "Rejoice, you Gentiles. You are part of God's people."

11. In still another place, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles. Praise Him all you peoples!"

12. Isaiah is more specific when he says, "The root of God's tree is in Israel, but the branches will reach out to cover the Gentiles, and they, too, will learn to put their trust in God."

13. Our God is a God of hope. May He fill your hearts with joy and peace in your faith so that you, too, will overflow with hope as the Holy Spirit gives you power to live for Him.

14. I am fully convinced, my brothers, that you are good people and quite capable of instructing and encouraging each other.

15. In some ways, I've written more boldly to you on these points than I normally do.

16. The reason for this is that God has given me His grace and called me to be an apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. So in one sense, I'm like a priest serving in the temple of the gospel of God. And to continue the priestly analogy, it might be said that the offering I present to God is that of the Gentiles, and they are an acceptable

offering sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

17. Therefore, I have a right to rejoice both in what God has done for me, as well as what He has done for you.

18. Now, I'm not so senseless as to speak about anything that I myself have done, except what Christ has done through me to help the Gentiles be obedient in word and deed.

19. Everything that was done for you was done through mighty signs and miracles through the Holy Spirit. I have preached the good news about Jesus Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum.

20. Ever since the Lord called me into the ministry, it has been my ambition and goal to preach the gospel where no one else had preached and where Christ had not been heard of. I followed this plan so that no one could later accuse me of building on what he had started.

21. As the Scriptures say, "The light of the gospel will be given to those who are spiritually blind and those who have never heard of Christ will learn about Him."

22. Many times I've been prevented in coming to you.

23. But now that I'm at the end of my third missionary journey, and I've covered much of the territory in this part of the empire, I really want to meet you and fellowship with you. I've been longing to do this for some time.

24. I'm planning to take the gospel into Spain, and on the way there I would like to stop over in Rome. I'm looking forward to this as one of the high points in my next missionary journey. I hope that nothing will interfere with my plans and that I will finally be able to enjoy your company, even if it's just for a little while, and after that I hope you will help me with my plans for Spain.

25. But first I have to go to Jerusalem with the relief funds for the believers there.

26. You see, the believers in Greece and Asia Minor have donated funds to help provide some of the necessities of our poor brethren in Palestine.

27. They were happy and willing to do so because they feel as though they're indebted to these believers for sharing with them the good news about Jesus Christ.

They decided that the least they could do to show their gratitude for the spiritual heritage that they received from them is to share with them a little of the wealth they have.

28. So after I've delivered their gifts and have made sure that the saints in Jerusalem understand with what great love these gifts were given, I will stop by to see you on my way to Spain.

29. When I come, I will share with you the good news and tell you all about the blessings that the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ has brought into our lives as well as into the lives, of others.

30. In the meanwhile, my brothers, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ and out of love and appreciation for what the Holy Spirit has done for us, please pray for me as I visit Jerusalem.

31. Pray that I'll be able to face the hostility of those in Israel who do not believe in the Lord, and that the believers there will gratefully accept the love offerings from the Gentiles without embarrassment and without misunderstanding.

32. Also pray that after I've delivered these gifts that I will have a safe journey on my way to see you, which I'm really looking forward to. May this be the will of our God so together we can have a spiritual feast.

33. In the meanwhile, may the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

CHAPTER 16

1. Let me suggest that, when Phoebe comes, you receive her as your sister in the faith. She's a member of the church here in Cenchrea.

2. Accept her in the Lord in the same way you would want the Lord's people to accept you. And help her in whatever way you can and with whatever need she has. She has been a great help to us here, always encouraging people in their faith and encouraging me, too.

3. Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila who have been such a great help to me, and as I've watched them, I have benefitted from their own dedication to Christ.

4. In fact, there have been times when

they endangered their own lives to save me. I will be eternally grateful for believers like that and I'm thankful for all the believers in the many churches we now have among the Gentiles.

5. Also give my greetings to all the members of that little group that's now meeting in their house. Give special greetings to Epenetus, whom I love dearly because he was my first convert in all of Asia Minor.

6. Oh yes, say hello to Mary, who did so many personal things for us and then worked so very hard to do what she could to help you.

7. Give our greetings to Andronicus and Junias, my own relatives who were also imprisoned for Christ's sake just as I was. They are well known by the apostles and, in fact, accepted Christ before I did.

8. Say hello, too, to Ampliatus, whom I dearly love in the Lord.

9. Greet Urbanus, a fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys.

10. Also say hello to Apelles, whose loyalty to Christ is without question, and to Aristobulus and his family.

11. Greet Herodion, who also is one of my relatives, and the family of Narcissus who are all in the Lord.

12. Then say hello to Tryphena and Tryphosa, two women who never stop working for the Lord, and to Persis, whom we love and who works so very hard for Christ.

13. Greet Rufus for me, whom the Lord has chosen to do a special work, and also his mother who has treated me like her own son.

14. Also say hello to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and all the believers living near them.

15. Finally, give greetings to Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the believers who live near them.

16. When you greet these people for us, give them a brotherly kiss. All the churches who are in Christ send their greetings to you.

17. Now I beg you, my brothers, watch out for those who criticize and create problems and oppose the basic doctrines

you've been taught. It would be best for you to avoid them.

18. These kinds of people are not really serving the Lord Jesus Christ, but are serving their own interests. They speak kindly and acceptably to everyone and so go around deceiving members who haven't had a chance to study as much as they have.

19. Your reputation for loyalty and obedience has spread everywhere, and I'm just thrilled with what I hear. That's one reason why I want you to be careful what you listen to and to continue to live the good, honest lives you're living, so that you may be of no service to evil.

20. There is no doubt in my mind that the God of peace will use you to triumph over the satanic forces in Rome. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. So be it.

21. Timothy, my fellow worker, Lucius, and Jason and Sosipater, who are my relatives, all send their greetings.

22. (I'm Tertius and I'm the one who's writing all these things down for Paul. I would like to quickly slip in a word of my own and add my greetings in the Lord

before Paul starts dictating again. Here he starts!)

23. Gaius, who is my host, as well as host for the whole church, sends his greetings. Erastus, who is the city treasurer, says hello, as does our good Christian brother, Quartus.

24. And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. Amen.

25. Now He who has the power to establish your faith in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which I preach, will continue to do so. And that which we preach is not based on hearsay but on what was done openly by God, who from the very beginning knew what He would do for us.

26. It's happened just as the prophets in the Scriptures said it would. This was predicted and done according to the plan of God so that everyone everywhere might know Him and then show their trust in Him by obeying Him.

27. Now our God, who is the embodiment of wisdom, deserves all the honor and glory that can come to Him through Jesus Christ, both now and forever. So be it!

I CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 1

1. **This** letter is from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and from Sosthenes, our brother in Christ.

2. I intend this letter to be read to the church in the city of Corinth, which is made up of people who have been set apart by Jesus Christ, called out to be living saints together with believers everywhere who accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

3. Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

4. I thank God every time I think about you, particularly for the grace of God which brought about such changes in you.

5. I'm thankful that you have so many talented people in your congregation and also that God has given all of you so many gifts. These gifts will help you understand the gospel better and tell others more clearly about God's great plan of salvation.

6. You even have the testimony of Jesus, which is the office of prophecy, in your midst which was confirmed as being genuine when we were still in Corinth with you.

7. So, you virtually lack nothing as you look forward to the eventual return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

8. He is the One who will preserve your faith while you're in this world, so on that day when Jesus Christ comes, you'll be able to stand before the universe totally innocent of sin.

9. You can always depend on what God says. When he called you into His grace, He called you to have fellowship with His own Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

10. Now I plead with you, my brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you emphasize the same things so that you don't end up causing divisions among you and splitting the church. You need to function as one person, having the same values, the same moral mindset, and the same objectives.

11. My brothers, the reason I mention this is that the Chloe family told me about some of the differences you're having.

12. Apparently, some of you are say-

ing, "I'm committed to what Paul says," and others, "I'm committed to what Apollos says." Still others, "I'm committed to what Peter says," and there are some who are saying, "I'm committed to what Christ says."

13. Now let me ask you: Is Christ behind all these divisions?

Who was crucified for you? Was Paul? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?

14. If that's what you think, then I'm glad I didn't baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius.

15. Otherwise, I could be accused of baptizing people in my name.

16. Oh yes, I did baptize the family of Stephanas. But besides these, I don't remember that I baptized anyone else.

17. The reason for this is that Christ didn't call me to stay in one place to baptize, although I can do that, too, but rather to preach the good news of salvation to everyone and to evangelize everywhere I go. Now when I preach, I don't use big words and complicated theological terms in order to impress people. If I did, then the death of Christ on Calvary would be a mystery to them and make things more difficult for the Holy Spirit.

18. **Those** who have bought into this world's philosophy see the preaching of the cross as something foolish. But to us who know the meaning of Calvary and have experienced its power in our own lives, we still have this saving relationship with Jesus Christ today.

19. As God says in the Scriptures, "My plan of salvation will undo the wisdom of those who think they are wise and will set aside the explanations of the scholars."

20. If that is so, then where does that leave the wise? What does that do to the scholars? What happens to those who love to discuss and argue theology? God's plan of salvation has made their intellectual gymnastics look rather foolish.

21. God, in his gracious ways and out of love, very wisely made it impossible for man to come up with an intellectual answer to the sin problem. But instead, He decided that people should be saved by

believing what the world calls the foolish message that the Supreme God would send His own Son to die for sinful humans.

22. Now, the Jews are always looking for miracles as proof before they believe. And the Greeks look to logic and think it first has to make sense to them before they believe.

23. So as we preach the good news of God's salvation through Jesus Christ, the Jews stumble over the fact that He let Himself be crucified and worked no miracle to save Himself, and the Greeks think that the resurrection of a dead body is nonsense and altogether illogical.

24. But those who believe the good news about what God did for them through Jesus Christ, whether they are Jews or Greeks, have experienced the power of the crucified and risen Christ just as we have. And now they acknowledge that God's answer to the sin problem is the only solution.

25. So you can see that the so-called foolish message of God is wiser and more effective than the wisest plan of man, and the weakness of God seen on Calvary is more powerful than all the strength and wisdom of man.

26. If you don't believe it, then look at yourselves, my brothers, and you'll see what I'm talking about. How many intellectuals, scholars, people who like to speak as authorities on this or that, or status seekers, have believed and accepted the good news?

27. It's through the so-called foolish people whose lives have been changed that God is speaking to the world, and this is what confounds the answers which the pseudo-intellectuals like to give. This means that God has decided to use the meek and teachable people of this world and those who are looked down on, to confound those who think they have all the answers.

28. Yes, God is using people who some think are worthless and of no consequence, and He even has things in store which have not yet happened, to stop those who think they know it all from depending on their own wisdom.

29. This is good, because in this way,

not one person can be proud of himself for coming up with the final answer to the question: How can I be saved?

30. But you have accepted Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of God's wisdom, as your Savior and Lord. Also, you have experienced in your own lives God's redemptive power as He has shared with you His righteousness and holiness.

31. As the Scriptures say, "If anyone wants to shout, let him shout about what the Lord has done."

CHAPTER 2

1. My brother, when I came to your city, I didn't come to attract you by my oratory or intellect as I shared with you the mystery of God's plan of salvation.

2. The reason for this was that I was determined not to have you center your attention on me, but on Jesus Christ and on His crucifixion.

3. When I first came, I purposely tried to be humble and meek, because I was afraid that I would end up preaching about myself rather than about Jesus.

4. As I preached, I decided to use as simple a vocabulary as possible without a lot of flowery words, because I was afraid that, if I did, people would be attracted to my speech instead of to what I was saying. I wanted them to be attracted to the Holy Spirit and to what He was able to do through simple speech so that they couldn't say it was my influence.

5. That way your faith wouldn't be anchored in man, but in God!

6. And those of you who are spiritually mature will recognize that there is wisdom in what I'm saying. True, it's not the world view of the people of this age nor of their rulers, whose kingdoms will pass away.

7. But it is the wisdom based on God's Word and it is this wisdom which sounds so mysterious and illogical to the secular mind. Yet it is this wisdom that was given by God to glorify man.

8. And this is the wisdom that statesmen and scholars did not understand. If they had, they would not have crucified the Lord Jesus Christ as they did.

9. That's why the Scriptures say, "The

eyes of man can't see, his ears can't hear, and his mind can't imagine what God has in store for those who love Him."

10. It was God Himself who told us what He had in mind for us. Otherwise we wouldn't have known it. Actually, it was the Holy Spirit, speaking through the ancient prophets, who told us about it. And if anyone can read the mind of God and know what God has in store for us, it would be the Holy Spirit.

11. Which one of us can read another man's mind and know what he's thinking, except the man himself, unless he tells someone? So how can anyone claim to know what God has in mind for us, unless God tells him? No one can know what God is thinking or how He thinks, except God Himself. And the Holy Spirit is also God and He is the One who told us the little we know.

12. So what we have shared with you is not based on our own wisdom, but on what the Holy Spirit said. And what we know about God's plan was given to us by the Spirit, because God wanted to reveal Himself to us and to help us recognize and appreciate the gifts He has so graciously given to us.

13. Now what we have been told, we have shared with you. As I said, this is not based on man's reason, but on what the Holy Spirit said. And the Holy Spirit is the One who helped us to understand God's revelation and He is ready to help anyone who shows an interest in spiritual things.

14. However, most people are not interested in spiritual things, nor are they interested in what the Spirit of God is trying to tell them. It doesn't make sense to them because their minds don't run in spiritual channels.

15. But those who are spiritually minded are given the ability to understand and evaluate spiritual things. But the secular man can't understand the spiritually minded man's insight into spiritual things.

16. As the Scriptures say, "Who can know the mind of the Lord so as to evaluate Him?" No one! Yet the Holy Spirit has helped us to understand the very mind and will of Christ.

CHAPTER 3

1. My brothers, when I first came to you, I couldn't talk to you as men accustomed to spiritual things. First I had to talk to you as men whose interests were solely of the flesh. Even after you were born again, I could talk to you only as infants in Christ.

2. I fed you spiritual milk and not heavy biblical meat because you wouldn't have been able to digest it. Even now I'm not sure that you can.

3. In one sense, your thinking and your values are still a lot like the values and thinking of the world. You're jealous of each other, you're constantly arguing among yourselves about non-essentials, and now you've even formed little political groups to rally around your favorite preacher. Aren't these the actions of men of the world?

4. When one person says, "Paul's my man," and someone else says, "My man's Apollos," aren't you acting like men of the world?

5. **What** is so important about Paul? And who is Apollos that he should get that much attention? Are we not just working in different ways to build up your faith and confidence in God?

6. I've been asked to help plant the seed of faith and Apollos has been asked to water it, but it's God who provided the seed to begin with and also makes it grow.

7. So the man who plants the seed isn't so great, nor is the man who waters it. But God is the One who does everything, because it's His power that gives the seed life.

8. This means that the person who plants and the one who waters are merely workers. Each will be rewarded according to the way he does his job.

9. Apollos and I are workmen laboring together for God to care for you. You are like a field or a building in which we work.

10. In harmony with the assignment God has so graciously given to me, I have tried with all wisdom to be a wise builder for Him. I carefully laid a solid foundation for someone else to build on. And that is what is being done, for which I'm glad.

But let every spiritual builder be careful how he builds and on what he's building.

11. I laid no other foundation than Jesus Christ because there is no other solid foundation to build on. Jesus Christ is the only safe foundation there is.

12. Some builders, as they build on the foundation that I've laid, use spiritual values which are like gold, silver, and precious stones, while others use less valuable materials like wood, hay, and straw.

13. Every builder's work will be tested, because the time will come when the fires of persecution will sweep through the whole building. Then we'll be able to see whose building materials will last.

14. If a builder's material survives, he'll be rewarded accordingly.

15. But if such a builder's material is burned up, many will be lost because of his shoddy construction. Now the builder might save his own skin, but the honor he could have brought with him to God will be lost forever.

16. Don't you know that you as a congregation are the living temple of God because the Holy Spirit dwells among you?

17. If anyone corrupts this temple, God will allow corruption to overtake him, because this temple is holy. And as a group of believers, you are this temple.

18. Don't let yourself be swept off your feet. If someone thinks he's brilliant in the light of this world's standards, he better think again. You need to help him to see that the cultural standards of this world are not a reliable measure of spiritual things. If he's wise, he'll be willing to become a fool in order to become spiritually wise.

19. What the natural man thinks about the universe and salvation God sees as rather foolish. As the Scriptures say, "God snares the wise in the nets of their own craftiness."

20. The Scriptures further say, "The Lord knows how people think, and those who think they're so clever are not really making sense."

21. So let no one boast about his intelligence or about someone else's cleverness. Your worth is rooted in the sinless humanity of Jesus Christ that ties our human race

into the family of God.

22. If you are a part of the family of God, then Paul, Apollos, and Peter are not competitors, but are all working for your good. And all things in this world, whether in the present or in the future, in life or in death, are all working together for your eventual good.

23. That's true because you're tied into Christ and Christ is tied into God.

CHAPTER 4

1. All of us who are sharing the good news with you are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2. And the one thing that's required of a steward is that he's faithful.

3. It doesn't matter to me what you think of me or how the church there evaluates me. I don't even try to decide whether I'm saved or not.

4. I don't recall doing anything contrary to the gospel, but it is God who will decide my future when the judgment comes, not my conscience, because a man's conscience is not always reliable.

5. So don't jump to conclusions and acquit or condemn others before the time of judgment, but leave that for the Lord to do. When He comes He'll make things clear, including things you can't possibly understand now. In that day everything will be made plain and the acquittal that really counts will come from God.

6. What I'm still talking about is your attitude toward me and Apollos. We are your servants and are to minister to your spiritual needs. You are to learn from us, but not to think of us as having more authority than the Scriptures do. By comparing us with each other, you end up taking sides and then boast of your choice.

7. Who is it that gave you your identity and made you stand apart from the world? And what insight do you have that wasn't given to you? Now if the insight you have is a gift from Christ through the Holy Spirit which you've received, then why are you acting as if you already had this insight on your own?

8. You're acting like little kings. You're rich, inflated with yourselves, and proud of your supposed wisdom. I wish under

God that all of you were kings, the right kind of course, so you could share your blessings with others and then we could all rejoice with you.

9. Sometimes I think that God purposely made those of us who are apostles to be the last show of the day, like gladiators who are constantly fighting battles, in any one of which we could forfeit our lives. In this sense we walk the stage of life, a spectacle to the whole universe.

10. Yes, everything is for Christ's glory, even if we are made to look like fools, while you are made to look like the wise ones. We are made to look weak and powerless, while you are made to look strong and influential. You end up looking like the ones who should be honored, while we are made to look like the ones who should be despised.

11. Yet over the years, and even recently, we have suffered hunger, thirst, cold from lack of clothing, beatings, and exposure from having no place to stay.

12. We have worked with our own hands to support ourselves. When we were cursed, we blessed, and when we were persecuted, we endured it without complaining.

13. When people insulted us, we answered back with kind words. To this day we are treated like garbage and the scum of the earth.

14. I'm telling you these things not to make you feel bad or to shame you, but, as my own sons and daughters, to make you aware of what I've been going through.

15. You may have ten thousand teachers in Christ that you can point to, but how many spiritual fathers do you have? You have only one. I am that one. I was the one whom God used to give you life and to bring you into the new world of Jesus Christ through the preaching of the gospel.

16. So if you need any human being to look to for a model, you ought to look to me.

17. That's one reason I've asked Timothy to go see you. He's like my own son and extremely faithful to the Lord. I want him to review with you what I taught you, to point out to you the principles I live by

and to tell you what I teach others everywhere I go.

18. Now some of you will say that I'm sending Timothy because I'm not willing to come and face you.

19. But I'm giving you my word right now that I will come as soon as possible, unless the Lord directs otherwise. If I'm ready to face all kinds of sufferings for Christ, and have done so, I'm certainly not afraid to come see you. When I come, we'll look past your fine rhetoric and oratory to see what moral strength you have.

20. That's what the kingdom of God is all about: not fine rhetoric, but moral force based on conviction and on a willingness to suffer.

21. So when I come, what do you want me to do? Do you want me to come with a whip to show you how strong I am or with gentleness to show you how much I love you?

CHAPTER 5

1. **Now** the reports that I'm getting tell me that one of your members is openly living in adultery with his stepmother. That's something even the unconverted Gentiles don't do.

2. And you are the ones who are priding yourselves on being so wise? You ought to be weeping and praying that the one who is doing this will stop or be removed from your congregation.

3. Even though I'm not there, I don't have to think twice to tell you what to do.

4. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I am asking you to do as I have already done and pronounce judgment on the man who has done such a thing.

5. You need to condemn this man's actions because, in doing so, you may be able to turn his life around and save his soul.

6. Just feeling great about yourself and your tolerance isn't enough. Don't you know that it takes only a tiny bit of yeast to impact a whole loaf of bread?

7. Get rid of this bad lump of yeast in your midst, so you can get back to your unleavened condition of innocence, which you had when you first accepted Christ. That's the kind of living bread you people

ought to be, because that's the kind of bread we use at Communion to remind us of Christ's sinless life and His death for us, God's own Passover Lamb.

8. So the next time you celebrate the Lord's Supper, do it without this awful wickedness, this bad yeast in your midst, and yet without hostility toward this man. You need to celebrate the Lord's Supper with the unleavened spirit of innocence, sincerity, and truth.

9. I wrote to you previously and reminded you not to fraternize with people living in such open and blatant adultery.

10. Now I'm not talking about non-members, because if you stay away from adulterers, from those who are greedy, from people who are downright rude, from drunkards, and from cheats, then you better live on another planet.

11. When I wrote to you before, I told you not to fraternize with anyone who is a church member, who claims to be your brother when everyone in the neighborhood knows that he's having sex with his stepmother. That includes members who are known for being immoral, greedy, idolaters, running others down, drunkards, and robbers. Don't keep on fraternizing with such people or the neighbors will get the idea that you approve of what these people are doing.

12. You have no business judging people who are not members, but you as a church do have a responsibility to discipline someone in your own group who acts like this and yet openly claims to be a follower of Christ.

13. Now God is the One who is responsible for the non-members, but you're responsible for the sinful members in your own group. You're expected to do something about such blatant, sinful behavior and not just sit by and think about how compassionate you are by looking the other way.

CHAPTER 6

1. I've also heard that if you have disagreements among yourselves, you go to a court of law to have them settled. Do you mean to tell me that you have a heathen judge arbitrate between you instead

of taking the problem to fellow Christians?

2. Don't you know that Christians will be the ones who will someday judge the whole world? So why should you submit your case to a heathen judge? And if Christians will be qualified to sit in judgment on this world, don't you think that you're qualified to handle the problems you have in your own congregation?

3. Do you realize that someday you'll sit as part of a universal jury to help decide the future of angels? How much more, then, should you feel qualified to handle matters pertaining to this life!

4. If, then, you have problems, why do you depend on non-members, who know nothing about why we Christians do what we do, to settle these disputes for you?

5. If you think that I'm trying to make you look foolish to shame you into doing something, you're right. Why do I do this? Because I'm sure there is at least one person in your congregation who is able to lead out and settle the matter.

6. And if that's so, then why should brothers go to court to have their disputes settled by non-Christians?

7. I'm telling you that what you're doing is not right. To have your differences settled by a court of law is just plain wrong. Even if a fellow church member defrauds you, don't take it to a heathen court, but settle it among yourselves. Why not rather suffer wrong as the Lord did than bring shame on the name of Jesus Christ.

8. I understand that you're going from bad to worse. Some of you think nothing of wronging your brother or cheating him in business, and I could go on and on. How do you expect things to improve if you don't change your own behavior?

9. Don't you know that people who act this way can't possibly be citizens of God's kingdom? Don't be fooled. Men and women who live immorally, who put their own interests ahead of God, who commit adultery, who practice homosexuality, who see nothing wrong with incest,

10. who steal, lie, cheat, get drunk, slander and defraud others will not have a part in God's kingdom.

11. Some of you were just like that before I brought the gospel to you. Now it was through Jesus Christ that God's grace broke the hold that sin had on you and cleansed, justified, and sanctified you. That is, gave you a right-standing before God and started you on the path of spiritual growth by which you die more and more to self and sin and live more and more for Christ and for right-doing. All this was done for you and in you through the name of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

12. **Now** you say that God has set you free and that you're enslaved to nothing. This may be true, but that doesn't mean everything is good for you, or that you have a right to do anything you want to without giving thought to whom it might hurt. Sure, I can say that I'm free to do anything. And in one sense that's true, but I'm not going to let anything enslave me, not even my personal freedom, except the love of Jesus Christ.

13. Some of you who like to eat say, "Eating is part of life. That's what the stomach was made for." That's true, but in this case God will destroy both. The body wasn't made just to consume food, but for exhibiting the godlike qualities of the One who made us. That's why our Lord died for us, not just to give us liberty to do as we please without feeling guilty.

14. Just as God honored our Lord's life by resurrecting Him from the dead and giving Him a new body, so God is planning to do the same for us.

15. Don't you know that our bodies are parts of the body of Christ? Should I then make part of Christ's body part of a prostituted body? God forbid!

16. Don't you know that when someone joins himself to a prostitute, part of his body becomes part of hers? That's what God meant when He created the two sexes in the beginning and said, "The two shall become one."

17. But you, as Christians, when you were baptized, became spiritually one with Christ.

18. So stop this immorality. Now it is possible for a man to sin without him sinning against his body, but when he

commits adultery, he's not only sinning against his body, but against the Holy Spirit.

19. Don't you realize that since you became a Christian, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives inside of you, and that His presence is a gift to you from God? So you're no longer in charge of yourself to do with your body as you please, even though you are free.

20. You see, you've been bought with a price, and this price no human being can ever match. Therefore, use your body to honor the One who paid the price for you. For you now belong to Him.

CHAPTER 7

1. **Now** I want to answer some specific questions you wrote and asked me about in response to my first letter. You asked me whether it isn't best to stay single. Under the present political circumstances, I think it is. For Christians to take on the responsibilities of marriage just now doesn't seem the best thing to do.

2. However, those of you who have fallen in love should get married to avoid the risk of committing adultery. A man in love should not feel that it's a sin to take a wife, and a woman in love should not feel it's a sin to take a husband.

3. And, after they're married, he should be a dutiful husband and she should be a dutiful wife.

4. The wife should not act as if she were still single. She's now married and belongs to her husband and should live to make him happy. The same holds true for the man. He's no longer single but belongs to his wife and should live to make her happy.

5. And so when you're married, you must live together as married people should. You must take care of each other's sexual needs, unless of course you both agree not to do so for a time so you can devote yourselves to fasting and prayer. But when that time is over, you need to resume your normal relationship lest Satan tempt one or the other of you with immorality.

6. This is not something the Lord has commanded in the Scriptures nor shown

me in vision, but it comes from a strong conviction and from years of experience and insight from God's direct revelation.

7. Actually, I wish that all of you were more free to come and go as I am. That way it would be easier for you to help me spread the good news about Jesus Christ. But everyone has his own talents and gifts which God has given him and each gift is different.

8. So my counsel to you is that those of you who are unmarried or who are widows or widowers stay that way and be as I am. Under the present circumstances, with the threat of persecution hanging over our heads, that's the only sensible thing to do.

9. Now if a couple is in love and doesn't have enough self-control to hold their emotions in check, let them go ahead and get married even under these adverse circumstances that we're facing. It's better to do that than to have your bodies feel as if they're being set on fire by your natural love for each other.

10. Now to the married I say, yet not I but the Lord, that a wife should not leave her husband to live by herself just because she thinks that under the present circumstances it's better not to be married.

11. But if she does so, let her stay single. And if she finds she can't stand to live alone, let her be reconciled to her husband. This same advice applies to a Christian husband who wants to divorce his wife. And it's certainly wrong for them to use the impending distress as an excuse to leave each other and then turn around and marry someone else.

12. To the rest of you I would say (and on this point it's again my own conviction and not based on a direct vision), if any one of you men who are married has a wife who has never accepted the Lord Jesus Christ, but she loves you and wants you to stay with you, don't leave her.

13. And any one of you married women who has a husband who is an unbeliever and he loves you and wants to stay with you, don't leave him.

14. This is important not only to show others that we are responsible and sensible people, but also because of the way

the Lord looks at your marriage. You see, the non-Christian husband who loves and cares for his Christian wife and respects her wishes is considered by the Lord just as set apart from the world as his wife is, because they are one. The same applies to the non-Christian wife who loves and cares for her Christian husband and respects his wishes. Otherwise your children would be raised like pagans. But now they are considered by the Lord as set apart because of their parents. And because this loving and caring atmosphere exists and the children are being properly trained and educated to love Christ, that's why the whole family is considered by God as His.

15. Now if your non-Christian husband or wife wants to leave you because of your religion, then it's best to let him or her go. Under those circumstances you are not obligated to stay together.

16. In this whole thing, none of us really knows what impact we're having on our non-Christian spouses. There is no way to know in advance whether the impact of a Christian wife's love and care will be a factor in her husband's salvation or not. Nor do we know whether a Christian husband's kindness and tenderness toward his unbelieving wife will be a factor in saving her.

17. So my advice is to continue in the marriage relationship or in the position in which the Lord found you when you became a Christian, unless there are some unusual circumstances which would dictate otherwise. This is the rule I follow in all of the churches.

18. If you were circumcised when the Lord found you and called you to become a Christian, don't worry and wish you had never been circumcised as if it's now a curse to you. And if anyone became a Christian who was not circumcised, he shouldn't worry and think it's necessary to do it now.

19. In our relationship with Christ, whether we're circumcised or not doesn't really make any difference. What really matters is whether or not we love Him and obey Him.

20. So let's not think that we have to change the way our bodies are before God

can accept us. That just isn't so. Let each of us realize that when he became a Christian, God accepted him just as he was.

21. You also asked me about some of our believers who are slaves. If you became a Christian while you were a slave, that doesn't make you inferior. If you can buy your freedom, by all means do it. And when you are free, continue to live as a Christian and use your freedom for Christ.

22. When you became a Christian, whether you were a slave or not, the moment you accepted Jesus Christ, you were free! Likewise he who was free when he became a Christian is now a slave of Christ to do whatever the Lord asks him to do.

23. Christ has paid the price to set you free, so don't think of yourself as a slave. You're not a slave to anyone because your spirit is free and through Christ it will always be free.

24. So in whatever situation Christ found you, remain there, for God is with you.

25. **Now** your next question had to do with young women who are virgins. Again, I have no direct instructions from the Lord on this, but I'm giving you some advice which comes from one who by the Lord's mercy can be trusted to speak for Him.

26. Under the impending distress, and considering some of the hard circumstances Christians find themselves in, I can't give you any other advice, except for them to stay single.

27. However, if they're already engaged, don't have them break up. But if they're not engaged yet, they shouldn't go out looking for a husband.

28. But if they get engaged and then are married, they haven't sinned or done anything wrong. Now those who do get married will have the usual problems of marriage on top of everything else that they have to face as Christians. And this is what I want to spare them from.

29. I just want to say this. Persecution could break out any minute, and when that happens, those who are married might find themselves painfully torn apart. So even those who have wives should not at

present make detailed plans for a long, happy life together, because it may not happen.

30. Also, those who feel like weeping should not be sad; those who have something to celebrate about should not become elated; those who have bought things should not become emotionally tied to them;

31. and those who have a business and buy and sell should not become too caught up in it. For our peaceful situation will not last much longer.

32. My concern is that you be free from as many worries and problems of life as possible. When a man is single, he only has to worry about himself and can serve the Lord more easily in these troublous times than can the man who is married.

33. When a person is married, he has to take many more things into consideration. He needs to watch out for the welfare of his wife and children and to care for them.

34. This holds true for a woman as well. There is a difference between a married woman and an unmarried one. The unmarried one can give more of her time to the Lord and use her gifts and talents more along spiritual lines. But the woman who is married has to divide her time the best she can between spiritual things and everyday responsibilities.

35. I'm telling you this for your own good. I'm not trying to create more problems for you. I want you to promote orderliness in the church and to give your undivided attention to the Lord's cause.

36. Now in the case of a young couple, if the young man feels that he's not behaving himself properly toward the girl, if his desires are strong and if he feels that they ought to marry, then let him marry her. He's not sinning.

37. But if he has firmly made up his mind to break the engagement and not get married, and he has himself under control, then he's not sinning if he doesn't go ahead and marry her.

38. And fathers who decide to let their daughters get married are doing what's right, and those who keep their daughters at home with them are also doing what's right.

39. Remember that once your daughter gets married, she is legally obligated to follow her husband as long as he's alive. It's only after he gets killed or dies and she's a widow that she's free to marry again--and free to marry whom she chooses as long as he's a Christian.

40. But considering the impending distress, if she decides to stay single, she'll be glad she did. I really think that this is the right thing to do considering the times we're living in, and I know that the Holy Spirit is the One who convicted me to give you this advice.

CHAPTER 8

1. **You** also asked me some questions about eating foods offered to idols sold at bargain prices in the marketplace. I can see from what you say that some of you have very strong opinions about this, and have come up with some supposedly good answers. However, being well educated doesn't necessarily mean that all your conclusions are right, because intelligence without love can easily lead to pride and insensitivity. But love always takes others into consideration.

2. The fact that someone thinks he has all the answers shows that he doesn't really know very much.

3. The most important thing in life is to love God. That's even more important than being well educated. And God knows who loves Him and who doesn't.

4. Now you want to know whether or not it's all right to eat things offered to idols and sold at bargain prices in the marketplace. First of all, we know that an idol is just a piece of stone or wood and doesn't know what's going on in this world, nor does it have control over anyone's life. And we also know that there is only one God who created all things and controls everything and that is the living God.

5. Secondly, people talk about their idols controlling their lives either from heaven or from somewhere here on earth, yet they keep on inventing and manufacturing more and more of these idols to control more and more things.

6. But we know that only one God is

in charge of everything and that is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is through His power that we live and move and have our being. And only one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, was involved with the Father in creating all things, and through His power they still exist.

7. However, everyone in your congregation hasn't fully absorbed this new truth and gotten rid of old fears of what idols can do. In other words, some people's consciences tell them that idols are still very real and can influence their lives for good or bad. It takes time to get over this kind of inbred attachment and fear. So naturally these people will hesitate to eat foods offered to idols, because they were taught that eating an idol's food is the same as worshiping that idol.

8. But we know that our eating this kind of food or not eating it has nothing to do with our relationship to God. Our spiritual standing with Him is not made better or worse because of it.

9. What you really need to be concerned about is to be careful not to abuse the freedom you have in Christ and end up hurting others who feel differently about this than you do.

10. If a new convert hasn't yet been able to fully detach himself emotionally from his former convictions and his conscience still bothers him when he sees you eating this kind of food, you're not helping him. By your example, you're teaching him to go against what he believes is wrong.

11. If by the exercise of your freedom, you are teaching your brother to ignore his conscience, and later in life he goes against his conscience, you've helped destroy a man for whom Christ died.

12. In this sense, by sinning against your brother and wounding his conscience, you have sinned against Christ.

13. So if eating food that's been offered to idols hurts someone else, I will not eat it as long as I live. I will not hurt my brother, nor will I by my example teach him that it's all right to ignore his personal convictions.

CHAPTER 9

1. **Now** let me change the subject for a

moment. Am I not an apostle? Haven't I personally seen and talked with the Lord Jesus Christ? Aren't you the result of my work in the Lord?

2. Maybe I'm not an apostle to others, but I am your apostle because your conversion is proof of my apostleship.

3. To those who would question my apostleship, I want to say something.

4. Don't apostles have the right to be supplied with food and drink by their own converts?

5. Don't we have the right to bring along a wife in order to have some kind of family life as other apostles do? Don't we have the same right to do as James, the Lord's stepbrother, and Peter when they bring their wives along with them?

6. And don't Barnabas and I have a right to stop supporting ourselves by mending tents?

7. Whoever heard of soldiers going to war without being paid by those they defend? Which fruit grower plants a vineyard and then isn't entitled to eat his own fruit? Who feeds a herd of cows and doesn't let his family drink their milk?

8. Am I saying this and using illustrations from life to prove something to my own advantage, or is what I'm saying based on the Scriptures?

9. God speaking through Moses said, "Don't muzzle an ox who is pulling a threshing machine to keep him from eating the grain he's working on." Now why did God say this? Is it because God is concerned about the animal's rights?

10. Or is there a lesson in it for us humans as well? Clearly it was written for us as well so that a man who plows and plants does so in the hope that he'll benefit from his work. The man who threshes out the grain works in hope of getting his share of the harvest.

11. Now if we have worked hard sowing spiritual seed, is it wrong for us to receive some material benefit from what we've done so we don't have to live like beggars?

12. If others claim their right to be fed by you and you're willing to pay them, don't we have the right to demand similar payment? But we haven't done it. We

chose to suffer and to go hungry. Why? Because we were afraid that, if we asked you to support us, you would think we were in the ministry to get rich.

13. Don't you know that in any religion priests who work in the Temple get paid by the money that's given, and that the caretaker shares the food that people bring in and leave at the altar?

14. Now, the Lord has decided that this same principle should apply to those who go from place to place preaching the gospel.

15. But I haven't made a living from my work and neither have I written to any of you asking for money. I would rather die than have any of you think that I'm preaching the gospel to get rich.

16. Don't get the idea from what I've said that I preach the gospel for personal satisfaction either. I preach the gospel out of an inner compulsion. I can't do anything else. Woe unto me if I don't follow through on my calling and take the good news of salvation to all who are ready to listen.

17. But even when preaching the gospel, I still have a choice whether to do it willingly or grudgingly. If I do it willingly and joyfully, then the only reward I need is seeing you respond to the gospel and accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. But if I work grudgingly and half-heartedly, or do it to make money, what right do I have to be paid, and to hold on to my calling to the ministry as a steward of God's grace?

18. So in case you're still suspicious and think that I choose to suffer and go hungry while preaching the gospel because there must be some reward in it for me personally, then let me tell you what my personal interest really is. First of all, preaching without pay makes me feel good, because the gospel can then be seen more clearly as God's free gift. Secondly, things are kept in proper perspective for me so that I'm not tempted to use my ministerial gifts to enrich myself.

19. Yes, though I'm a free man and can do what I want, I have chosen to be a slave of the gospel and Christ's church in order to win as many of you as I possibly can.

20. So when I preach to the Jews, I try to live like a Jew in order to win as many of them to Christ as I possibly can. And when I preach to those Jews who are very law conscious, I try to live just as carefully and scrupulously as they do, even though in Christ I don't have to, but I do this in order to win them.

21. To the non-Jews, that is, to those outside the law, I also try as much as I can to live as they do, even though I can't be quite as free-living as they are, because I'm first of all under the law of love to Christ. But I do live as close to their way of doing things as I possibly can in order to win them.

22. And to those who are sensitive about certain issues, I try to be sensitive about the same issues. So I try to fit into the social and cultural patterns of people as much as I can in order to win them to Christ.

23. I do this for the sake of the gospel so that all of us can enjoy the good news together.

24. You know that in athletics everyone who participates gives it everything he has, but only one person in each group gets the laurel wreath. That's how you should throw yourself into the gospel race. And everyone who does so will be a winner.

25. You also know that everyone who wants to participate in some national sport event disciplines himself to live as healthfully as he can. What motivates him to do this? It's to win the victor's laurel wreath! But that laurel wreath will soon fade and die, while the victory wreath we'll receive is the crown of life, which will never fade away.

26. So I run in the gospel race, not as if I don't know where I'm going or don't know where the finishing line is, for I do. And I don't fight by just standing there beating the air, but I know how to make every punch count.

27. I not only train others this way, but I also keep myself fit lest I be disqualified. So I discipline myself and make my body serve me and do for me whatever I think the circumstances call for in order to win as many as I can to Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 10

1. Now I don't want you to be uninformed or forget about certain parts of our Jewish history that have meaning for you. I want you to know that all our ancestors were led by Christ in a pillar of cloud and brought by Him through the Red Sea.

2. And the sea parted and they walked over on dry ground, and as they went through the waters, they were figuratively baptized by Moses in the presence of Christ, who was in the cloud.

3. Furthermore, they all ate the same supernatural food

4. and drank the same water miraculously provided for them by the Rock that was with them, and that Rock was Christ.

5. In spite of this, most of them rebelled and displeased God and so He let them die in the desert, except for a few of them.

6. These things are recorded and have been handed down to us as examples to teach us not to eat and drink and lust after evil things as they did.

7. Do not become idolaters as some of them were. As the Scriptures say, "The people thought only of eating and drinking and of pagan orgies."

8. And let's not indulge in immorality as some of them did. Remember that God showed His disapproval and twenty three thousand of them died in a single day.

9. So do be careful not to presume on the goodness of God as some of them did. The Lord could not continue restraining the serpents to protect His people in their sinning. So they were bitten and died.

10. Don't grumble and complain as some of them did, because it's a sin against God Himself. Their grumbling and complaining caused them to be destroyed by the same angel who killed the first-born in Egypt.

11. All these things were written down for our benefit and as a warning to us so we won't do the same things they did, especially since the Jewish age with all its ceremonial rituals has come to its end and you are now God's people.

12. Don't become overly confident and think of yourself as standing so firm that you won't fall or that you can do anything

you want and it won't affect your salvation.

13. Also remember that there is no temptation that comes your way that some other people haven't had. God is faithful and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but will with the temptation provide a way of escape so you'll be able to overcome it.

14. Finally, my dear people, stay away from anything you might be tempted to idolize and make more important than God.

15. Now I do want to talk to you about idol worship and eating foods offered to idols. I'm speaking to sensible men so you'll be able to judge whether what I have to say makes sense or not.

16. For instance, the grape juice that you pray over and then drink at the Lord's Supper represents the blood of Christ, doesn't it? And the loaf of bread which you bless and then break and eat, doesn't it symbolize the body of Christ?

17. And if we all eat of the same loaf of bread, and if that one loaf represents one Person's body, then aren't we saying that we all belong to that one Person?

18. Consider the people of Israel. When they ate part of the sacrifice, weren't they considered one with the God they worshiped?

19. What am I trying to say? Am I saying that sacrifices made to idols amount to nothing and that the idols themselves amount to nothing?

20. But the sacrifices offered by the heathen are being offered to demons and not to God! And I don't want you to be identified with demons.

21. You can't drink the grape juice and eat the bread at the Lord's table and then eat at the table of demons.

22. By doing this, aren't you tempting the Lord to intervene and do something He normally wouldn't do? Do you think you're stronger than the Lord and prevent him from doing what He needs to do?

23. Yes, as a Christian I'm a free man and in one sense I have a right to do what I want, but on the other hand, I no longer have that right. In other words, anything

that God has expressly forbidden, I will not do, and anything that has the appearance of evil to those who are seeing it as such, I will avoid.

24. Let's not be so much concerned about our own freedom as with what we can do to help our brother.

25. So in one sense you're free to go to the market to buy food that has been offered to idols, if that's what you want. And if it doesn't bother your conscience because it has no meaning for you, that's fine.

26. God made everything that grows and lives, and everything He made, He made to make man happy.

27. Now if unbelievers invite you out to dinner and you want to go, go ahead. Whatever they serve you, select what you can eat and don't worry about whether it was offered to idols or not.

28. Now if the unbelieving host says to you that this or that item of food has been offered to idols, he's trying to keep from going against what he thinks is your conscience. Then for his sake don't eat those particular items or he'll think that you don't take your faith seriously.

29. I'm not thinking so much about your conscience, but also about his conscience and his sensitivity to your faith. So don't eat those items. Now, you say, "Why should I let another man's conscience curb my freedom?"

30. If I graciously accept an invitation to dinner and give thanks to the Lord, why should I be criticized because of what I eat and am thankful for?"

31. Well, let me tell you why. Whatever we do in this life, whether we eat, drink, or whatever we do, we do everything to honor God.

32. So don't go around offending the consciences of people, whether they're Jews, Gentiles, church members, or non-church members.

33. I try not to offend anyone in anything I do, and I don't worry about what pleases me or what doesn't. I want to be as helpful and sensitive to others as I can possibly be. I never try to seek my own advantage, but that of others in order for them to be saved.

CHAPTER 11

1. I'm glad that you feel safe in following my example, just as I feel safe in following Christ's example.

2. I want to commend you because you have not forgotten me and you're holding on to the things that I have so diligently taught you.

3. Now there are some other things I want to tell you. Just as a man leans on the strength of Christ and a woman has a right to lean on the strength of her husband, so Christ received His strength from God. This means that we all acknowledge a power source outside of ourselves.

4. Because of the culture we live in, certain things we do make a statement about our dependency on God. For instance, if a man keeps his hat on when he's praying or preaching, he's understood to be dishonoring God.

5. Similarly for a woman. If she prays or speaks to God without wearing something on her head, she's understood as dishonoring her husband as well as God. It's the same as if she had shaven her head.

6. And if she won't cover her head, then as far as the visitors who came are concerned, she might as well shave her head and go around bald as the shameful women do. But it is disgraceful for a woman to be bald, and so it's just as disgraceful for her not to wear something on her head while worshipping God.

7. And a man ought not to have long hair as if he were a woman. If he does, he denies the meaning of his own creation; he is not a woman. A woman is to be seen as a woman because that's what she is. She is not a man, for she was created out of man.

8. What I'm telling you is all recorded in the Scriptures. The first man was not born from a woman, but the woman was taken out of man and was different from him.

9. Man was created first and then the woman, which means that man is to assume the role of head in his family and provide the necessary spiritual leadership.

10. On account of the angels and the watching universe, then, the woman ought to wear something on her head.

11. So in the Lord, woman is not independent of man, but neither is man independent of woman.

12. While woman came from man, no man is born without a woman. And this arrangement comes from God.

13. So you can come to your own conclusions without my having to tell you. Is it right for a woman to pray or speak to God with her head uncovered? Of course not.

14. Doesn't nature itself teach you that a man has more difficulty growing long hair than a woman does? And if a man does grow long hair, isn't he seen as being a disgrace to your culture?

15. Now, a woman grows long hair more easily, and if she does so, isn't it seen as her glory? And her ability to grow long hair more easily was given to her by God as a natural way of covering herself.

16. Now if anyone still wants to argue the point, we teach no such custom as you're trying to introduce, of women worshipping without a head-covering, nor do any of the other churches.

17. Next, I want to mention something to you that's not easy for me to say. It's not something I can praise you for, so it won't be to your credit. The way you're doing things in your church is making matters worse.

18. I hear that when you attend church, you only sit with your group of friends. Well, I'm not surprised.

19. Maybe we should tolerate that for the time being and let the members of the various groups separate themselves from the others, at least that would be one way to tell who the genuine Christians really are.

20. But this is not the way to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

21. I Also understand that after the Lord's Supper each group has its own meal, with one group trying to outdo the other group so that the whole thing turns into a gluttonous feast; and I hear that some of you actually get drunk. In the meanwhile, the poor in the church just stand by and look and then go home hungry.

22. If you feel you must get together with your group, can't you do that in

someone's house? Don't you have any concern for the church? And why would you exclude members from eating with any of your groups just because they're poor? What do you want me to say about this? Do you expect me to congratulate you on some of the spiritual improvements you have made and because of this ignore what you're doing now? No, I will not.

23. I've received direct instructions from the Lord on how to celebrate Communion, which I dutifully passed on to you. The night before Christ was crucified, He took a plain loaf of bread,

24. and, after He had said the blessing, He broke it in half, passed one half to each side, and said to His disciples, "Break off a piece for yourself. As you eat it, I want you to think of it as representing my body which will soon be broken. And when I'm gone, remind yourselves by doing this, what I have done for you."

25. Then, at the same supper, He took the glass of pure grape juice, blessed it, and said, "This pure juice represents the fulfilment of God's covenant to provide the needed blood atonement. So each time you drink it, remember what I've done for you.

26. Every time you get together to eat this bread and drink this juice, you are to recall the last days of my life until I come back."

27. Now you can see the contrast between how the Lord and His disciples ate the last supper together and how you're doing it. You've turned the whole thing into a picnic. Anyone who celebrates the Lord's Supper the way you're doing is eating and drinking contrary to the whole meaning of it, and by doing so is rejecting and crucifying the Lord all over again.

28. The way to eat the Lord's Supper is for everyone to first examine his own spiritual condition, next to confess his sins to God, and if need be, his faults to his brothers. Then, in a spirit of gratefulness and joy for what Christ has done for him, he ought to sit down to eat the bread and drink the grape juice.

29. For any of you who eat and drink without respecting these symbols and acknowledging the oneness of the body of

Christ, that is, the church, is bringing judgment on himself.

30. That's one reason why so many of you are spiritually weak and have all kinds of physical ailments. It seems that all you think about is food and all you do is eat while the poor are slowly dying for want of proper food. So I wouldn't be surprised if some of you have suffered heart attacks and died and others of you have gotten sick.

31. If we were to see our actions as they really are and to evaluate ourselves carefully, our behavior wouldn't come under the Lord's judgment.

32. When we do come under judgment, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we might not be condemned along with the world.

33. So, when you decide to have the Lord's Supper, announce it in advance so people can plan ahead. That way all can feel that they belong and have a part in the spiritual fellowship and in the meal that follows.

34. If anyone wants to turn the Lord's Supper and the meal that follows into a gluttonous feast, let him eat at home, so that, when you do come together, it doesn't result in your condemnation. Now, about the other things you ask, I'll give you further directions when I come.

CHAPTER 12

1. **Now** concerning spiritual gifts, I don't want you to be ignorant about why they have been given to us.

2. First of all, before you accepted Christ, remember how easily you were led to worship one idol after another? Remember how you were involved in all kinds of vulgar practices that go along with this kind of worship?

3. I want you to know that no Christian can curse Christ and then turn around and say that he's been filled with the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit fills only the lives of those who are loyal to Christ. In fact, no one can be loyal to Christ without the Holy Spirit.

4. It's true that there are different gifts, but it's the same Holy Spirit who gives them.

5. And there are different ways of serving, but the gifts are given to honor the same Lord.

6. So you'll find that people in your church have different spiritual talents, but all of these come as gifts from the same God.

7. This means that the presence of the Holy Spirit is shown in different ways, but it will always be for the good of all.

8. To one person the Holy Spirit gives special wisdom and insight into spiritual things. To another He gives the knowledge and ability to come to grips with hard subjects.

9. Someone else is given unflinching confidence in God in the face of danger, which is also a gift and not something that's just natural. Another member has been given the gift of healing, and so on. All these spiritual gifts are given to us by the same Holy Spirit.

10. You'll find that one person can work miracles, another has been given the gift to preach like a prophet, another may be called to the office of a prophet, someone else can detect the slightest evidence of demonic forces, others can suddenly speak in different languages, and still others have the ability to interpret what is said.

11. But all these gifts are given to us by the same Holy Spirit, and He gives these gifts to whomever He will, whenever He will, and how He sees fit.

12. **The** best illustration of how this works is the human body. Our bodies have many parts, but we still have only one body. And because we, the church, are Christ's body here on earth, we also have many parts, and function as one body.

13. That's the purpose of these spiritual gifts which the Holy Spirit gives us. After we are baptized, He fits us all into the body of Christ. It doesn't make any difference to Him whether we are Jews or Gentiles, free men or slaves, because we all belong to Christ and get our strength from one and the same Holy Spirit.

14. Now we know that the human body is not just one big foot, but many parts.

15. Can you imagine my foot saying to me, "I'm going to stop walking because you don't give me the same recognition

that you give to the hand. I guess I really don't belong to your body." Does that make the foot any less a part of my body?

16. And can you imagine my ear saying to me, "I feel like I don't belong because you haven't given me the same position that you've given to the eye. So I really don't belong to your body." Does that make the ear any less a part of my body?

17. Suppose every part of the human body wanted to be an eye-- how would we hear? And if all the parts of the body wanted to be an ear, how would we taste or smell?

18. Now God put together the various parts of my body so it can function in a way that would best serve me.

19. If my entire body were just like one of its parts, then what would happen to me? Where would I be?

20. In order to have a well functioning body, you need all the necessary parts. Yet, it's still considered only one body.

21. That's why the eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you. I can get along without you." Nor can the head say to the feet, "I can do without you, so be on your way."

22. If anything, the parts of our bodies which seem weak and delicate, like our eyes, are absolutely essential.

23. Our internal parts which we don't normally talk about, we treat with great care, and our private parts we treat with special modesty.

24. And those parts of our bodies which are made to be more public do not require such care and modesty. God has composed the body in such a way, that the greater care is given to the parts which need it.

25. This brings balance into the body, so that every part of the body is concerned about the other parts.

26. If one part of the body gets sick, the whole body feels it; and if each part performs well, health and happiness flow through the whole body.

27. Now that's how the church functions. It's like a huge body with different parts. It is Christ's body in the world.

28. It's logical then, that Christ's body would have different parts, too. First, some members function in the line of apostles, having a clear picture of the church's mission. Second, some might have the spiritual gift to guide the church prophetically. Third, other members have the ability to teach others and train them in Christian ministries. After these three major functions, God put other parts in the church such as those who work miracles, those who can heal, those who can administer and manage, and those who can preach in different languages.

29. Can everyone be a leader? Does everyone have the gift of proclamation? Do all the members know how to train and teach others? Can everyone perform miracles?

30. Is everyone able to heal? Can all speak in different languages or can all interpret?

31. No, we're not all alike, and we don't all have the same gifts. Now, it's not wrong to want additional gifts if you don't separate yourself from the body by doing so. But let me show you a much more excellent way to honor the Lord than through additional gifts. Let me tell you about the fruit of the Spirit.

CHAPTER 13

1. If I had the spiritual gift of speaking in any language I needed to, including the language of heaven, but didn't have that selfless love for others that Christ had, my gift would sound like a bronze gong and a pair of clanging cymbals.

2. If I had the prophetic gift to predict the future and the gift of knowledge so that I could understand everything, no matter how difficult it is, and if I had the gift to see through all problems, and the gift of faith to work mighty miracles, such as moving mountains, but I didn't have that selfless love for others that Christ had, all these gifts would mean nothing.

3. If I were to give everything I have to the church, and could donate enough money to feed the world, or if I were to become a martyr-hero and unflinchingly face death by fire, but did not have that selfless love for others that Christ had, all

such heroic acts would be worthless.

4. The kind of selfless love that Christ had is patient and kind. It never envies. It never puffs itself up. It never thinks of its own importance or serves only itself.

5. This kind of selfless love is never rude or behaves unbecomingly. It's never interested in itself and its own advantages. It never focuses only on what's wrong.

6. The kind of love for others that Christ had is never happy when things go wrong in people's lives, even if they brought the trouble on themselves. But it always finds joy in what's good and in the eventual triumph of what is right.

7. This kind of love believes in people. It is always full of hope, and it always takes what comes its way without complaint.

8. The kind of selfless love that Christ had will never become obsolete, but one day prophesying will, as will the gift to speak in different languages, and even much of what we've learned.

9. The reason for this is simple. Our knowledge is not complete and our prophesying gives us only a small glimpse of the future.

10. When the end comes and God gives us complete knowledge of things, then that which is only partial and incomplete will pass away.

11. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, because I understood and thought as a child. But when I grew up and thought as a mature adult should, I stopped talking about things as a child would. My childish thinking was no longer adequate for my adult life.

12. When we compare our present life to the future life, we are seeing only the reflection of things, but then we will see and understand things about ourselves as clearly and perfectly as God understands and knows us now.

13. The only things that are important in life and that really count are faith in God, hope for the future, and having the kind of love for others that Christ had. These are the only three qualities that really matter, and the greatest of these is having the love that Christ had.

CHAPTER 14

1. **That's** why I'm suggesting that you focus first on the kind of love for others that Christ had, and after that on your spiritual gifts, especially the gift of proclaiming the word of God.

2. So let's look at the practical side of things. If you are speaking to the church in a language no one understands, you're talking to nobody but yourself and God. And if you're the only one who benefits from the gift the Holy Spirit has given you, what good is it?

3. For example, hasn't the person who has the gift of proclaiming the word of God been given this gift to help and encourage others? And isn't this true of the other gifts as well?

4. But if the person who has the gift of languages uses his gift to speak to people who don't understand what he's saying, he's encouraging no one but himself. What he should do is use his gift to encourage others and strengthen the church.

5. Now all of you seem to want the gift of languages, and that's fine. But I would rather that all of you longed for the gift of proclaiming the word of God, especially under the present circumstances. The gift of proclamation is better than the gift of languages because it helps the church grow, and right now that's what you need. So you can see that speaking to the church in different languages is no help to the church, unless someone interprets what the other person is saying.

6. If I came to visit you and preached in another language, it might show how gifted I am, but would that help the church? Of course not. Instead, I would use some of my other gifts, such as the gift of apostleship to give you a sense of mission, or the gift of spiritual insight to give you more understanding, or the gift of prophecy to give you guidance, or the gift of teaching to train you to do your Christian work better. These kinds of gifts help the church grow.

7. Let me illustrate so that you can understand what I'm trying to say. Musical instruments such as flutes or harps can only be appreciated if they give clear, distinct notes. If their notes do not harmo-

nize, how will you know what is being played?

8. On the battlefield, if the trumpet gives an unfamiliar sound, how will the soldiers know what to do? Should they advance or retreat?

9. The same applies to our spiritual gifts. Unless you can speak in a language people can understand, how will they know what you're talking about? All you'll be doing is talking to yourself.

10. I know that there are many languages in the world, and they all have their linguistic advantages and fine shades of meaning.

11. But how will these advantages help me? The speaker is like a foreigner to me, and I'm like a foreigner to him.

12. Since you're so zealous for the manifestation of the Spirit in the form of gifts, why don't you pray to have those gifts that will benefit the whole church? I can't understand why so many of you are hung up on having the gift of languages and are praying so hard to get it. I hope you're not doing this just to impress people.

13. What you need to do is to insist that the speaker make clear what he's talking about. God could, of course, decide to work a miracle as He did at Pentecost and suddenly give everyone the ability to understand in his own language what the person up front is saying.

14. If at church I pray in a language that no one understands, my own heart may be uplifted, but no matter how polished my prayer is, it will help no one else.

15. So what's the point of praying that way? When I pray, I not only want to pray with my heart, but also with my mind. I want to sing with my heart, but I want to sing with my mind also. That is, I want to use words that people can understand so I can inspire them to pray and sing.

16. The same thing holds true for the gift of teaching. If someone tried to teach in a language no one understood, how could those who were being taught and trained in Christian work say, "Amen" what you're saying?

17. When some of you give your personal testimony and express your gratitude to God, you may give a wonderful

and fluent testimony, but if you say it in another language, how can those who listen be blessed?

18. Actually, I can speak more languages than any of you because God has given me that gift, and for that I'm thankful.

19. But when I come to church to worship or to preach, I'd rather speak five intelligible words which instruct the hearers than to speak ten thousand words in a language no one understands.

20. So, my brothers, don't keep looking at these things through the eyes of children and sit there in wonderment. You need to stay as innocent and harmless as little children, but when it comes to thinking, you need to think the way mature Christians should.

21. As the Lord says in the Scriptures: "You won't listen to me when I speak to you in Hebrew, and even when I speak to you through the actions and lips of foreigners, you still won't listen."

22. So from this you can see that the gift of languages is primarily a tool for reaching non-Christian people with the gospel, while, on the other hand, a gift like the call to the prophetic office is to help guide those already in the church.

23. What I hear about you is that, when you come together to worship, each one who has the gift of languages insists on speaking, and soon all of them are speaking at the same time. Can you imagine how this sounds to a visitor coming in?

24. On the other hand, when those who have the gift of prophecy, or proclamation, or teaching stand up in church and give members practical lessons on how to live the Christian life, and a visitor comes in, he can understand what's going on. This will also give him something to think about. Who knows, he may later decide to become a Christian.

25. He may be very honest with himself and right then and there be convicted that he's a sinner, fall on his knees, and acknowledge that God has worked through you to help him.

26. **And**, when you come together, how can you let one sing just because he insists that his song is inspired; another one preach

because he insists he has some special doctrine that's very important; someone else prophesy because he claims to have had a vision; and others speak because they claim they are the only ones who can understand spiritual things and make them clear to the congregation? This shouldn't be, but let all things be done for the encouragement and upbuilding of the church.

27. If some insist they have something special to say and can say it best in another language, then try them out by letting only two or three speak at any one church service and only one at a time, and have someone there who can interpret for them.

28. If you can't find someone who has the gift of interpretation, forget it. Let these language-gifted people keep quiet and listen. If they feel that they must talk, they can always commune silently with themselves and with God.

29. Only let two or three speak at any one church service and only one at a time, and after what each one said has been interpreted, then let the congregation pass judgment on whether what they said is the truth or not.

30. Now if someone thinks he has a special message, let the first speaker step aside until this special message is shared with the congregation to see whether it is true, and then let the first speaker speak.

31. And one by one, all of you can have a chance to speak and encourage the church.

32. But you need to test each one's claim to truth by what the prophets in the Scriptures have said. That way you can know if the Holy Spirit or some other spirit is controlling the speaker.

33. The main thing to remember in all of this is that God is not the author of confusion, but of orderliness and unity. Not only does He want it done this way in your church, but also in all of the churches.

34. And there are rules that apply to women attending church. They have to discipline themselves to listen as we all have to when we come to church, for that is quite in harmony with what the Scriptures teach us to do.

35. If these women can't understand

everything that is being taught and would like to know what it means, they should wait until they get home and ask their husbands. If the pagans want to speak out and shout in their places of worship, let them do so. But it's not very becoming for a woman, or for anyone, to behave this way in a Christian place of worship.

36. Let me ask you a question. Does God speak only to you, or are you the only ones whom God uses to speak to others?

37. One way to test those who claim to have a special message from the Lord is to see whether they acknowledge that what I'm writing to you is also from the Lord.

38. If anyone does not want to listen to what I've said, then he doesn't have a special message from the Lord as he claims he does, and what he says shouldn't be accepted as truth.

39. And as I've said, of all the gifts God makes available to you, pray mostly for the gift of proclamation and not the gift of languages. But don't stop others from using their gifts, whether they have the gift of languages or any other gift.

40. The main point I'm trying to make in all of this is that when you come together to worship, everything should be done decently and in order.

CHAPTER 15

1. **Now**, my brothers, I want to say something about the good news which I've shared with you, which you've accepted, on which you stand,

2. and by which you're saved. There are some things I've told you that are basic and that you need to keep in mind, otherwise your faith has no meaning.

3. What I've shared with you, I didn't originate. I received it just as you did. The fact remains, and always will, that Christ died for our sins, and this was according to Scripture.

4. He was buried and on the third day, rose again, and this also was according to Scripture.

5. Afterward He appeared to Peter, then to the twelve, and they all saw Him and touched Him.

6. Then more than five hundred believers saw Him at one time, and although

some of them have died, most of them are still alive.

7. Next, He appeared to James, His own stepbrother, and finally, just before he ascended, to all the apostles at one time.

8. Last of all, He appeared to me. I saw Him with my own eyes and He taught me for three years just as He taught the apostles. As far as I know, I was the last one having this privilege.

9. So since I was the last to be taught, I am the least of all the apostles and don't really deserve to be called an apostle, because before I met Christ I persecuted the church terribly.

10. Only by the graciousness of God I am what I am. And His grace was not given to me in vain, because since then I've worked harder than any of the apostles. Yet, I haven't been the cause of it all, but God's grace within me is what pushes me into doing things.

11. The point is, that whether I brought the truth about Christ to you or whether someone else did, it's this truth that's the foundation of your faith.

12. Now if we believe and preach that Christ rose from the dead, how can some of you teach that there is no resurrection?

13. If there is no such thing as a human body being resurrected from the dead, then Christ is still dead and His body hasn't been resurrected either.

14. And if Christ is still dead and hasn't been resurrected, then all our preaching is senseless and our faith, worthless.

15. This would make us false witnesses because we've preached something that isn't true. And if what you say is true, that the dead are never raised, then we have misrepresented God, because we said that God raised Christ from the dead when He never did raise Him from the dead.

16. Let me say it again. If it's true that there is no resurrection of the human body, then Christ never rose from the dead.

17. And, if Christ never rose from the dead, then everything else we believe about Him is ridiculous, and our sins are not really forgiven, because He was found to be a sinner and had to remain dead no matter what else we say about Him. If we can't exchange our sinful body for a sin-

less one like He had, then the good news of salvation is meaningless.

18. And those of us who have died and are supposedly sleeping in Christ and waiting for the resurrection are gone forever.

19. If our faith can benefit us only during our life on earth, then we really have a most pitiful belief.

20. But Christ was sinless and has risen from the dead, and His resurrection is the beginning of the great resurrection experience that will come to all of us who believe, when God will send His angels to harvest the fruit of the earth.

21. One human being brought death into the human race and another human being brought in the hope of the resurrection.

22. As a result of Adam's sin, all of us die, but in Christ, all of us can live.

23. But these resurrections must be understood in their proper order: first Christ Himself as the beginning of a great harvest, next the people of God at His advent, and then comes the final end.

24. At that time, Christ will hand everything back over to God the Father. But He will not do this until He has put an end to all authority and power.

25. That's why He has to be in charge of everything now. Under God, He will continue to exert His influence and power until all enemies of good are gone and sin is no more.

26. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

27. God the Father has given Christ full authority over everything, but when He did this, He obviously excluded Himself. After all, He's the One in charge of everything to begin with.

28. And after Christ has carried out His mission and put down all authority and power on God's behalf and for the good of mankind, then the Son of God will once again be subject to God the Father as He was before He came. He will then assume His rightful place in the universe without opposition, just as it was in the beginning. And once again, harmony will pervade the universe and God the Father will be all in all.

29. If all this were not so, then being baptized in the hope of seeing your dead loved ones is meaningless since there is no resurrection. And if there is no resurrection, why be baptized at all?

30. And why do you suppose we're willing to endanger our lives by the hour, if there's nothing beyond this life?

31. I tell you, brothers, as surely as I glory over your being in Jesus Christ, hardly a day goes by without my facing a threat on my life.

32. If I needed to, I was even prepared to face the wild beasts in the arena at Ephesus and to brave death as thousands sat and watched, but what would I have gained in doing all this if there were no hope of a resurrection? Let's just eat and drink and be merry because eventually we'll die, and that'll be the end of everything.

33. But don't be a fool. Remember the Greek proverb that says, "Bad company ruins good character."

34. So come back to your senses and don't believe what every speaker says who comes your way. Concentrate instead on getting your own thinking straight. Many of these speakers you're listening to don't know what they're talking about. I'm disappointed that you're so gullible. I'm trying to shame you into listening to me.

35. **Some** of these self-appointed apostles will ask you questions which will only confuse you. They will say, "How can dead bodies be resurrected? Have you ever seen a dead body that's been resurrected?"

36. Let them stop and think! Don't they know that nature itself teaches us that nothing can sprout to life unless it first dies?

37. When a farmer sows seed, doesn't he sow the same kind of seed which he expects to harvest?

38. God makes the seed sprout and gives it the power to produce new seeds just like itself.

39. It's the same within the animal kingdom. There are different kinds of bodies, yet each one produces after its kind. Fish have one kind of body, and birds another kind. And the crowning work of

earthly bodies is seen in the human family, and we also produce after our own kind.

40. Then there are heavenly beings with still different kinds of bodies. They are similar to earthly bodies and yet different. Heavenly bodies have their own distinctiveness just as human bodies have theirs.

41. And looking at the universe, we see the same principle at work. The sun has its own kind of beauty, as does the moon and do the stars, and within the universe each star has its own kind of brilliance and beauty.

42. So on this earth we have sinful bodies which deteriorate and die, but in the resurrection our bodies will be sinless and never die.

43. A dead body is not very appealing, but resurrected bodies will be beautiful. When a body is dead, it has no potential, but when it is raised, it will be full of life and power.

44. Our bodies will be buried as physical bodies, and they will be raised as physical bodies, but they will also be part of another dimension, a spiritual one. They will be like Christ's body, both earthly and heavenly all in one.

45. As the Scriptures say, "Adam, the first man, was created out of the soil of the ground, and God breathed life into him, and then he became a living being." But Christ, who is the last Adam and the spiritual Head of our race has life within Himself.

46. Now notice the sequence of things. It was not the spiritual which was given first, but the physical, then the spiritual.

47. That is to say, Adam, the first man, had a body of dust, equipped to live only on earth, as all of us do. But the last Adam has a body which can live in heaven or on earth.

48. So there are earthly bodies which are natural and sinful, and there are heavenly bodies which are spiritual and sinless. As Adam was made of the earth, so are all human beings; and as Christ was born of God, so are those who are born again.

49. And even though we are men like Adam, we are also men who bear the image of the heavenly Man, Jesus Christ.

50. What I'm trying to tell you, my brothers, is that sinful human flesh and blood, as it is now, cannot be admitted into the kingdom of God. Sin cannot be given life and freedom and be allowed to function in a place where there is no sin. That's why our bodies have to be changed.

51. Let me explain some of the mystery of all this. All human beings who do not believe in Christ will remain limited human beings. They will die and never live again. But all those who believe in Christ will be changed and live forever.

52. In a moment, before you can blink an eye, God will do this. When the last trumpet sounds, those of us who are dead will be resurrected and given incorruptible bodies. And those of us who are still living will be instantly transformed into imperishable beings.

53. Sinful bodies will be replaced with sinless ones, and beings with a limited life span will be given a life that never ends.

54. So when these sinful bodies are exchanged for sinless ones, and our limited life span is exchanged for a limitless one, then the Scriptures will be fulfilled, which say, "Death is swallowed up in victory!

55. Oh, death, where is your sting? Oh, grave, where is your victory?"

56. You see, the sting of death is sin, and the authority of sin comes from the law. And the law that governs the whole universe says, "Only those things which serve may live."

57. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory over sin and death. And all this is given to us through the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

58. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast and unmovable, and hold on to your faith. Always be glad you're on the Lord's side and do all you can for Him while you're still alive. Whatever you do for Him in this life is not just busywork, but extends its influence throughout eternity.

CHAPTER 16

1. **Now** I want to switch to a subject that concerns the immediate needs of the saints. I've been collecting funds from all

the churches in the province of Galatia to take to the poor in Jerusalem. I would like you also to contribute to this fund whatever you can.

2. I would suggest that on the first day of every week, each of you sit down at home and figure out how much you think you can give. This will depend, of course, on how God has prospered you. If you decide what you can give before I come, then when I get there, you can bring it to me so I won't have to take time to go around collecting it.

3. And after I get there, I'll write letters of introduction for the men you select, and send them on their way to carry your gift to Jerusalem. Many believers there are destitute because they lost their jobs when they accepted Christ and haven't been able to get work since. So whatever you can do to help will be appreciated.

4. Whether the Lord wishes me to go to Jerusalem, too, remains to be seen. If he wants me to go, then we can go together.

5. At present, my plan is to arrive in Corinth after I go through Macedonia, because I need to see how the believers there are doing.

6. Once I get to Corinth, I hope I can spend the whole winter with you and get some rest. Then you can send me on my way healthier and more energetic.

7. I don't want to see you on the run. I really want to stay with you for some time, unless the Lord has something else in mind for me.

8. The only other congregation I really need to spend some time with is the one in Ephesus. I hope to stay with them for about six weeks, up to Pentecost.

9. One of the reasons I want to stay with them is that the doors for evangelism are really opening up there. That gives me another chance to preach the good news about Jesus Christ to many new people, even though I know it won't be without opposition.

10. If Timothy gets to your place before I do, I don't want you to give him a hard time, or for him to have any reason to be concerned about your unchristian conduct. He loves the Lord just as I do and is doing the same kind of work among the churches.

11. Don't let anyone look down at him. Accept him, love him, and then send him on his way joyous over you, so when he comes to me, there will be peace and happiness in his heart instead of concern and sadness. I'm very anxious to see him again and the others coming with him.

12. As far as Apollos goes, I'm encouraging him and the other brothers who are with him to stop by to see you again. At first he didn't think that it was best to do that, but finally he agreed and promised to come see you as soon as it was convenient for him to do so.

13. In the meanwhile, stay alert to what's going on, hold on to what you believe, act as mature believers should, be courageous, be strong.

14. But whatever you do, do it selflessly and with love, as the Lord Jesus Christ would.

15. Also, I want to ask you to be supportive of the laymen preaching the gospel. I'm sure you know the family of Stephanas. They were the first ones in Greece to step out and become Christians. Since then, they have devoted all their spare time to encouraging church members wherever they travel.

16. Listen to such men and women and treat them with respect, as if they were working directly with me.

17. I'm glad that men like Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus stopped by to see me. They did for me what you would have done if you were here.

18. They really cheered my soul as they did yours. These men deserve to be recognized and honored because they've been such a blessing.

19. The members here in Asia Minor send their greetings. Aquila and Priscilla and all those worshiping in their house send special greetings.

20. Everyone here sends his love. Remember when you meet, to greet each other with a Christian embrace as fellow believers should.

21. Now, these greetings at the end of my letter I'm writing with my own hand. Yes, they're written by Paul's own hand.

22. Remember that if anyone doesn't want to follow the Lord, let him reap the

consequences of his own choice. Don't try to force him to be one of us if he doesn't want to be. How I wish the Lord would come soon and put an end to sin.

23. Now the grace of our Lord Jesus

Christ be with all of you.

24. I want you to know that my commitment to you in Jesus Christ is still as strong as it ever was. So be it.

II CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 1

1. **Greetings** from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and from Timothy, our brother in the ministry. I'm sending this letter to the church of God in Corinth and to all the saints scattered throughout the whole of Greece.

2. Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Let all of us express our gratitude to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is most gracious and compassionate toward us, and the God of all comfort.

4. He knows how to comfort us in all our troubles so we can comfort others in all their troubles, as we share with them the comfort we receive from God.

5. Just as we have a share in Christ's suffering for the salvation of the world, so through Christ, God the Father gives us the same help and comfort He gave Christ.

6. And we suffer for you because we love you and want to see you saved. When God comforts us in our troubles, we want to use that same comfort to comfort you in your troubles. We want to strengthen your faith and courage as you face some of the same troubles that we're facing.

7. We have great hope for you and our confidence in you is firm and has never wavered. We know that, if you're having the same troubles we're having, you'll receive the same comfort from God that we're receiving.

8. My brothers, I want to let you know about some of the troubles we've been having in Asia Minor. We've had such difficulties here that at one time our physical strength gave way and we even wondered whether we'd make it through alive.

9. And since our strength was gone, we felt as if our bodies had decided to pass the death sentence on us, but this only made us rely more on God, who can raise the dead.

10. In the past He has saved us from being killed; this time He saved our bodies from giving way; and we have confidence that in the future He will continue to do for us what He thinks is best.

11. And you must help us with your

prayers, so that, when our trials are all over, many will give thanks to God for the strength He granted us in answer to your prayers.

12. **Our** joy is that in sincerity of conscience we can write to you and use simple words to talk about great spiritual truths. And by God's grace, we will continue to live by the truths we teach and conduct ourselves toward you and everyone else as we should.

13. We don't write one thing and do another, but live by what we say and teach. And we see from your letters that you understood what we wrote, because you responded to what we've said by living out the same truths in your lives as we do in ours. Also, I have confidence in you that in the months ahead you will understand even more fully what I have said.

14. We are proud of you and how you responded to what we said, just as you are now proud of us for saying it, and this gives us confidence that we will see you on that day when the Lord Jesus Christ comes back to take us all home.

15. It was with this confidence in you that I was planning to come to see you. I thought that this way we could all be blest by our fellowship together.

16. My plan was to stop to see you on my way to Macedonia and then again on my return so you could help me get ready for my trip to Judea.

17. As I told you, I made these plans in all seriousness, and once I decide to do something, I'm not one to change my mind, saying yes one time and no another time. Other people may change their minds, but once I say yes or no, I mean it.

18. That's how God is. You can depend on His yes and no, and so you can depend on our yes and no, too.

19. Remember, when I first preached Jesus Christ among you, how I, Silvanus, and Timothy spoke to you with unwavering certainty? We didn't speak with a yes, or a maybe, and then with a no, but with a solid yes, in Christ.

20. This is the kind of certainty on which God's promises are based, a solid, un-

equivocal yes, followed by a confirming amen. That's how we preach and we do so by the power of Christ to the glory of God.

21. Truly God has rooted us together in Christ and has helped us to stand for Him wherever we go.

22. God has put His seal of ownership on us by putting His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee that we belong to Him, and that's why our spirit can harmonize with His.

23. Now God is my witness that the reason I didn't come to you as I promised I would, was not because I changed my mind and broke my promise, but to spare you some painful rebukes and to let some healing take place.

24. This does not mean that we're trying to be your lords or to control you by doing your thinking for you, but that we want you to be happy in the Lord. Your relationship with Him is the source of your joy.

CHAPTER 2

1. I determined within myself that I would not come to make you sad again, as I did before.

2. Because if I make you sad, I'll be sad, too. Then who's going to cheer me up?

3. That's one reason I wrote you the letter. I didn't want to come to be made sad by making people whom I love unhappy. So it was easier for me, this time around, to write to you instead. When we meet, we will all be glad to see each other without having to be sad.

4. It was with much pain and with a troubled heart and after some tears that I decided not to come to you as I promised, but to write to you instead. I didn't write that first letter to you to show my authority or to make you sad, but because I love you and really care about you.

5. If anyone hurts you by saying unkind things about you, it not only hurts you, but it hurts me as well. So I'm not saying very much about the incident we talked about before, because I don't want to hurt that person still more by letting him know how hurt I am. You disciplined him and he's hurting from it. That's

enough.

6. He's already felt the pain of your disapproval, as he should have. We can't expect to carry out our corporate responsibility of disapproval of a member's public misconduct without hurting some feelings.

7. But now that you've disciplined him, you should also show him that you've forgiven him, and make him feel comfortable in your presence, so he doesn't get discouraged and give up being a Christian altogether.

8. What I'm asking you to do is to show him that you really love him and care about him.

9. I wrote to you and told you what to do, because I wanted to see from a distance if you would listen to me and be the kind of Christians you should be without me having to be there.

10. Whomever you forgive, I'll forgive, too, and when I forgive anyone, I do so completely in the same way Christ forgave me. And I've forgiven all of you for anything that anyone of you has done to me.

11. Forgiving is important. We not only need to forgive each other because Christ has forgiven us, but also to prevent Satan from coming in among us, for we are not ignorant of his designs on us.

12. By the way, another reason I couldn't come to you when I promised was that the Lord directed me to go to Troas. After I arrived, I found that the time was just right to preach the good news about Jesus Christ.

13. When I finished my work in Troas, I waited for Titus. When he didn't come, I got restless, said goodbye to the people, and left for Macedonia.

14. Thanks be to God, who has given us the victory in all things, and who has enabled us to spread the fragrance of Christ's love and the knowledge of His saving grace everywhere we go.

15. And as we spread the fragrance of Christ's love and grace, we think of it as an offering to God. We spread it alike among those who receive His salvation and among those who reject it and then end up perishing for the lack of it.

16. So the fragrance of what Christ has

done is like the aroma of incense that accompanies the parade of a victorious army. To some, the aroma signals a time of celebration and a new life, while to the captives this means death. So among those who choose to reject the gospel, the fragrance of Christ is an odor of death because it leads to death. But among those who accept the gospel, it is an odor of life because it leads to life. When we realize how much is involved in ministry, we wonder who is arrogant enough to think that he is capable of assuming such an awesome responsibility?

17. We don't do things as many self-appointed preachers do. They handle this message as if it were some kind of merchandise. But we handle it respectfully, delicately, and with all the sincerity we can muster. The reason for this is that God has called us into this work. We didn't take it on ourselves. So we are very conscious of the fact that we're working in His very presence and under His supervision.

CHAPTER 3

1. I hope this doesn't sound as if we're trying to convince you that we're better than someone else, or that we're trying to recommend ourselves to you or even asking you to recommend us to others.

2. You are our letters of recommendation and your changed lives are living evidence of our work, and we carry that evidence with us wherever we go. Furthermore, these kinds of letters can be read by anyone, no matter who they are.

3. You are living letters of recommendation from Christ delivered by us, not written with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not written on paper or carved on stone, but on human hearts.

4. Such living evidence is the basis of our confidence in God and in His work, which has been given to us because of what Jesus Christ has already done for us.

5. We are not saying that in and of ourselves we are good workers or that we're even thinking that way. We know full well where our dependence lies and that any spiritual competence we have doesn't come from us, but from the Lord.

6. It is God who has made us compe-

tent ministers of His newly confirmed covenant. And it is He who has helped us to successfully share the gospel with you. We didn't come to you as attorneys trying to get you to sign some legal document. But we came as ambassadors offering you a new life. Legal agreements with God have no life in them. But the arrangement offered to us by the Holy Spirit bubbles over with life-giving power.

7. Now the good news of salvation was spelled out in the Old Testament by God at the time He wrote the commandments on tables of stone, and when He told the Jews to build Him a sanctuary in the desert. Those events, which were accompanied by such glory, were misunderstood and misapplied by the Jews until they sounded as if God had pronounced a death sentence on mankind. And when Moses came down from the mountain, the Israelites couldn't even look at him because his face was so radiant with glory. Yet all this glory was to pass away.

8. When you think of what the Holy Spirit is doing today, and what He's writing on people's hearts, isn't that more glorious than God writing His law on tables of stone and His message of love in shifting sand?

9. If a system of religious services, that contained only promises of salvation, and in itself could not give life, was so glorious, how much more glorious is God's promise of salvation today, now that these promises have been ratified through the death of Jesus Christ and have been personally experienced by you.

10. Because of the incomprehensible and glorious act of God's giving His Son to die for us, the Old Testament services and promises are now fulfilled and fade into the background.

11. If that which lasted only for a short time was so glorious, how much more glorious is that which will last forever.

12. We speak to you very boldly and confidently because our hope of salvation is now made sure.

13. The glory we proclaim is not like that of Moses. He had to put a veil over his face to cover God's reflected glory because the people were afraid to look at

him. Yet even this glory has now faded into the background.

14. In one sense, the Israelites are still wearing the past glory of that veil today. Their hearts are as hard as the stones on which the Ten Commandments were written, so that reading the Old Testament promises makes no impression on them. That's why the veil will remain over their faces, because only in Christ can these rituals be understood. But the Israelites are too stubborn to acknowledge that.

15. You can see this as you attend their synagogues. They read the writings of Moses every Sabbath, yet the veil of stubbornness and misunderstanding remains.

16. But when they do open their hearts to the truth, as some of them have, and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, that veil falls off and the significance of the Old Testament rituals are finally seen for what they were.

17. The Lord works through His Holy Spirit, and wherever the Holy Spirit works there is freedom from useless works.

18. So now the faces of all of us are radiant with joy as we reflect the glory of the Lord. And we want people to see our growth in grace as we're changed more and more into His image by the workings of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 4

1. Therefore, since we have experienced the mercy and graciousness of our God and have been called into the ministry to share this good news with others, we will never allow ourselves to become discouraged to the point of giving up.

2. As ministers of the gospel, we do not practice deceit; we don't play church politics, nor do we falsify the word of God to please others. As we said before, we live and practice the truth as if we were in the actual presence of God. This is the way we recommend ourselves and our ministry to everyone's conscience.

3. And if our preaching of the gospel is veiled, that is, if it is vague, it is vague only to those who are perishing, because they've already closed their hearts and minds and are not really hearing what we're saying.

4. In this case, Satan, the god of this world, has blinded their eyes to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he has captured their minds so completely that the light of the gospel can't even penetrate any more.

5. You see, we are not preaching the gospel for our sake, but as servants, for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

6. God, who in the beginning said, "Let there be light," and there was light, is also the Source of spiritual light, and this is the light that has penetrated our hearts. He gave us this light, expecting us to pass it on to others, and this light is the knowledge of the glory of God as seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

7. We are only like clay pots, but we do hold a special treasure, which is God's power to transform sinful humans into new creatures, and that power does not come from us.

8. Everywhere we go, we seem to have troubles, but we're not crushed. Sometimes our lives are threatened and we doubt whether we're going to live, but we don't despair.

9. We're often rejected and cast out, but we're never alone. At times we're badly hurt, but our spirits are never broken.

10. We consider our difficulties a privilege. Through our physical and emotional pains we can draw people's attention to the sufferings of Christ and to the sustaining power of a resurrected Lord.

11. We're constantly being threatened with arrest and imprisonment, and even with execution, because we're preaching Jesus Christ and living out His love for us so others can see it and be saved.

12. So while death follows and stalks us everywhere we go, new life has sprung up in your souls, making all our suffering worthwhile.

13. We have the same boldness of faith that the ancients had when one of them said, "I believed and therefore I have spoken." Because we have faith and believe even as they did, we also speak.

14. We know that if we're killed, God, who raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the

dead, will not leave us dead, but will raise us to life as He did His Son. And together with you, Christ will present us as live trophies to the whole universe.

15. Now all this planning and activity is for your sake in order to save you from sin and give you eternal life. What God has done for all of us through His grace will return to Him, in thanksgiving and praise from places all over the world to His honor and glory.

16. Because of Him we never give up in discouragement. Even though outwardly things go wrong and we suffer, and even though our bodies are wearing out, yet every day new life and determination spring up inside of us.

17. The troubles we're having now are not to be compared with the glorious future that lies ahead for us. Compared to eternity, the whole of earth's history is only a few moments of time.

18. We don't look at our circumstances as they are now, but as they will be. What we see around us is temporary and will soon be destroyed, but that which people can't see will last forever.

CHAPTER 5

1. We know that if this earthly body of ours which we now inhabit should be destroyed, we have a new body waiting for us, not one shaped in a womb, but an immortal body made by the hand of God.

2. This is the body we really long for and groan to have. In fact, we wish we could have it now.

3. If we had that kind of a body, we would no longer have to fear that our lives were at stake, or to feel so utterly helpless.

4. But, since we're still living in our earthly bodies, we suffer and groan our way through life. Now don't get the idea that we long to die. We groan because we wish our frail mortality could be exchanged for the endurance and vibrancy of immortality. Then we could really work for the Lord.

5. God's original intention for mankind is still the same. He created us mortal to test us, and then to bestow on us immortality. He has given us the Holy Spirit as a pledge that His original plan for us

has not changed.

6. That's why we can speak with such confidence, even though we're still living in our clay bodies as everyone else is and are not yet living with the Lord.

7. Our confidence is not built on ourselves, but on Him. Our faith and trust in Him is not based on outward appearances but on what He has accomplished for us.

8. That's what our confidence is built on. We all would prefer being with the Lord rather than being here.

9. But whether we are here or there doesn't really matter. Our goal is to be more and more like Christ and to please Him.

10. Eventually, all of us will have to appear before Christ to be judged by Him. We will be held accountable for what we have done while living in this body of ours, to see whether what we did was good or bad.

11. **Therefore** knowing what lies ahead for each of us, we try to persuade men and women to do what is right, and while our motives for doing so are open only to God, we do hope that you perceive them for what they are.

12. Now, we're not telling you all this to show you how good we are, but to give you an opportunity to be legitimately proud of us. We want to give you some answers for those critics who judge us by our outward appearance and don't look at our hearts.

13. Now, even if it sounds to you like we're beside ourselves, we will still praise God. If it sounds to you like we're in our right mind, we'll praise you and God.

14. The love of Christ leaves us no other option. It is this that motivates us. If Jesus Christ had to die for everyone, then everyone was doomed to die, and that includes us.

15. Since He did die for all, then how can any of us live just to please ourselves? We need to live for Him who died for us, who was resurrected for us, and who now lives for us.

16. That's why we put no human being ahead of Christ, not even ourselves. We know that He was human, but also, that He was God in the flesh, and this is what

gives Him priority over all other human beings.

17. If anyone accepts Christ into his life, he will be re-created from within. Old values of selfishness are passed away and new values of selflessness have taken over. He is a new and different human being!

18. Now all this has happened to us because God through Christ took the initiative to bring us into harmony with Himself, and He has now given us the privilege to bring others into harmony with Him.

19. And as we carry out this ministry of reconciliation, we proclaim that, in Christ, God brought the world back into harmony with Himself by no longer counting the sins against those of us who believe. This is precisely the message that He has entrusted to us, a message of love and reconciliation.

20. This means that we are God's ambassadors, representing what He did for us in Jesus Christ. We speak to you on His behalf as if He Himself were here. So we plead with you on God's behalf that you accept His gracious act for you and make things right in your own life.

21. It was for our sake that God laid our sins on Christ, who knew no sin, so that we might be free from the bondage of sin and through Him choose to do what is right.

CHAPTER 6

1. As workers together with Christ, we plead with you most earnestly, that now that you have accepted God's gracious act for you in Christ, don't accept it without making it meaningful.

2. As God said through the prophet, "Your prayers for help to live right have come at a time in history when I've decided to act." For us this is the accepted time to respond wholeheartedly to God's salvation.

3. This is our purpose: to live for God and to respond wholeheartedly to Him so that our ministry does not become a hindrance to other people's salvation.

4. In everything we do, we want to show you that we are God's servants. We want you to know that we're willing to

endure all kinds of troubles and face all kinds of difficulties and hardships for your sake.

5. We have been whipped, imprisoned, and mobbed. We have worked to exhaustion, had many sleepless nights, and even gone without food.

6. We feel we have proved who we say we are by living Christian lives, by preaching the truth of the gospel, by being patient and kind, and by being accepting of people everywhere. All this was made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit.

7. Our message is true. And that we've told you the truth has been proved by the power of God within you. Right-doing is our weapon of attack and of defense, which we hold on to with both hands.

8. We've been honored and disgraced, insulted and praised, and we were told we were liars, when we were telling the truth.

9. We've been treated as foreigners, and then again as friends. We've been close to death, and yet we're still alive. We've been badly beaten, yet we've survived.

10. We've experienced deep sadness, yet we're always glad. We are poor, yet our ministry is rich. We own nothing, yet all of our needs are met.

11. **My** friends, we have opened our hearts to you in Corinth as to no other group, and we've spoken quite frankly to you.

12. We have not shut you out of our love, but you seem to have closed your hearts to us.

13. Let me talk to you for a moment as if you were my own children. Let me ask you, isn't it expected that children show at least some affection for their parents, who have shown so much affection for them? Then why don't you open your hearts to us?

14. Don't tell all your problems to non-Christians. And don't go into business or into partnership with those who believe differently than you do. It won't work. How can right have fellowship with wrong? What does light have in common with darkness?

15. How can Christ and Satan be in partnership? That can't be! And if that

can't be, how can you as a Christian go into partnership with a pagan unbeliever?

16. Is there no difference between the Temple of God and the temple of idols? Of course there is. In fact, there's a great deal of difference. You are God's living temples. Didn't God say, "I will live inside of them. I will walk beside them. I will be their God and they will be my people"?

17. The Lord said in another place: "Come out from the world and don't accept its values. Separate yourselves from pagan practices. Have nothing to do with what is impure. Then you'll continue to be my people.

18. We can be a family. I will be your Father and you will be my sons and daughters." And to think that this invitation is extended to you by the Almighty God Himself!

CHAPTER 7

1. Therefore, dear people, having received God's invitation backed by His promise and power, let's change our way of doing things and let's not do anything that will make our bodies and souls impure.

2. Now let me come back to the question I asked you earlier. Why can't you make room in your hearts for us? We haven't wronged anyone, ruined anyone, or taken advantage of anyone anywhere, much less of you.

3. I'm not saying this to shame you. As I told you before, that's not my purpose. You're very much on our hearts and so much so that, whether we live or die, we'll never be separated from you.

4. The reason I can talk this way is that I'm very proud of you. In all the troubles I go through, I'm always encouraged and made to feel good whenever I think about you.

5. **Since** we've arrived in Macedonia, we've had no rest or peace. We've had to face all kinds of troubles, debates with the Jews, and threats of violence from the townspeople.

6. But God didn't forget us. That's the way our God is, always finding some way to comfort and encourage those who are

downhearted and discouraged. And in this case, He encouraged us by the unexpected arrival of Titus.

7. Now it wasn't just because of Titus that we were encouraged, but mostly because of his report about you, how kindly you treated him and how you've changed. He told us how eager you were to see me, how sorry you were for what you did, and how eager you are to stand with me in everything I've said. This is what gave me new courage, made me feel so tremendously happy, and lifted my spirits as nothing else could.

8. So even though that earlier letter of mine made you feel bad, now I'm no longer sorry that I wrote it. At the time, I did feel bad about what I had to say, because I knew it would hurt you.

9. I'm really happy now, but not because I think of myself as some kind of spiritual champion who flexed his moral muscles and wrestled you into submission. I'm happy because God by His grace saw fit to use me to lead you to repent and to change your ways and to come back to Him. So in all this you weren't hurt by us, but you were helped.

10. When people are genuinely sorry for what they've done, it generates a repentance which says that by God's grace they are determined not to do that sin again. This kind of repentance leads to eternal life, but a repentance which doesn't lead to an anti-sin conviction is of the world. It means nothing and leads only to death.

11. Just look at your repentance. How different it is from the repentance of the world. Look at what it has done for you. How earnest you are about your faith. How careful it has made you to live as you should. And how eager you are to clear yourselves of your past mistakes and shameful reputation. Look how angry it made you against sin and yet how afraid that you might sin again. Look at the desire you now have to do right, at your commitment, at your zeal, and at your willingness to follow through with church discipline. There is no doubt in my mind that you have now cleared your name and have shown other Christians the kind of men

and women you really are.

12. When I wrote to you, I didn't write the letter just to help the one who was living in sin, nor to comfort the one who was being hurt, but also to let you know how much we care about you and how committed we are to preserve your relationship with Jesus Christ and your standing among the believers.

13. We were happy and encouraged when Titus brought us this good report about you. He's as thrilled as can be about your turn-around, about your renewed joy in the Lord, and about the way you treated him.

14. Before I sent him to you, I really talked you up to him, and, as usual, you didn't let me down. I knew I wouldn't have to take back what I said, because what I said to him about you proved to be true.

15. As a result of his experience with you, his devotion to you is almost as deep as mine. He still recalls very vividly how eager you were to carry out his suggestions. He remembers how you greeted him with fear and trembling, yet with respect and determination to do what was right for the church.

16. How happy I am that I can depend on you so completely and that once again you have verified my confidence in you.

CHAPTER 8

1. **Now** my brothers, let me share with you what God's grace has accomplished in the churches in Macedonia.

2. The members here have had their faith severely tested by the trials they've gone through. Yet, they are bubbling over with joy. Even though many of them are poor people, they are extremely generous in their giving.

3. I can personally testify to the fact that of their own free will, they gave more than they needed to give or that they should have given.

4. They even begged us to accept their donations when we hesitated to do so, because they wanted to have a part in helping their impoverished brothers and sisters in Judea.

5. This is more than we had hoped for.

First they gave their hearts to the Lord all over again, and then they gave what they had for the folks in Judea. And they did all this to the honor and glory of God.

6. So we urged Titus, since he was the one who initiated this collection for the poor members in Judea, that he contact you and give you, too, the opportunity of having a part in this great love offering.

7. You're a privileged congregation to have such spiritual gifts as rock-like faith, the ability to speak well, to make hard-to-understand things plain to others, and to have insight and knowledge given to you by the Lord. And knowing also about your eagerness to help others and of your love for us, we want you to exhibit your generosity in harmony with your spiritual gifts by having a part in this love offering.

8. Now this is not a command for you to do this, but because others are so eager to help, I wanted you, too, to have an opportunity to do something. This will give you a chance to show how sincere your love is and to have a part in this joint venture.

9. You know how gracious and kind the Lord Jesus Christ was. Even though He owned the whole world and had all the riches at His disposal, yet for our sake He chose to be poor, so that through His poverty you might become rich.

10. So the advice I'm giving you is that you take advantage of this opportunity to give and to share with others what you have. You started to do this a year ago, but never followed through with it.

11. Why not finish what you've started? This time be as eager and willing to finish the project as you were in planning for it. Start with the funds you have on hand and then go on from there.

12. If you give whatever you have willingly, God will graciously accept it as a gift of love, not because you gave much, but because you gave what you had.

13. My intention is not to weigh you down in order to lighten the financial burden of others. That's not at all what I have in mind.

14. But because you have more than most of our churches do, it's only fair for us to urge you and all of our congrega-

tions to share your blessings equally with our brothers and sisters in need. If the time ever comes when you are in need and they have more than you, then they need to help you. This is only fair, because in that way every congregation is treated equally.

15. This is the same principle we find in the Scriptures, where it says, "The one who gathered much could not hoard it, and the one who could gather only little had all he needed."

16. **How** grateful we are to God to have put into Titus' heart the same love and concern for you that we have.

17. Not only did he welcome our suggestion to include you in his offering plan and to go to help you, but he also, left eagerly and on his own accord, because he loves you.

18. Now the Macedonian brother I'm sending with him has a splendid reputation among all the churches for his boldness in preaching and his other services in the gospel.

19. Besides, he has been chosen by the churches there to travel with us and to help us in finishing this project, which is to bring glory to God and to show our good will to our fellow believers in Judea.

20. We are very careful as we travel from place to place not to create any complaints about why we're doing this and why we're collecting this money.

21. Our intention in all of this is to do it right and in such a way that it will meet the approval of our Lord and of the brethren.

22. And besides these two, I am sending another brother with them, whom we have often tested and whom we have found to be honest in all matters, and because of the good things he has heard about you, he has more confidence in you than ever.

23. As far as Titus is concerned, he is my partner in the Lord and is working with me to help you. If anyone asks any questions about the other men accompanying Titus, know that they're all representatives of provinces, and they're all loyal believers committed to bringing glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

24. Their coming will give you a chance

to prove to all the churches they represent how genuine your Christian love is. Then, too, you can prove to them that what we told them about you is true.

CHAPTER 9

1. I see no need to write you a detailed explanation about this loveoffering to Judea.

2. I know your eagerness and readiness to help. This is what I told the members in Macedonia, telling them that you have been ready to help since last year. And your eagerness to help with this project has motivated them to help even more.

3. Now we're sending these representatives to you so they may see for themselves that what we told them about you is true. So be ready for them, as I told them you would be.

4. I'm sending some of these men to you ahead of time so they can help you get started on the project. In that way, when I come with the other Macedonian brothers to receive your donation in a lump sum, we won't be embarrassed to find that no collections were made, or that you're not willing to help. If that happened, it would not only be embarrassing for us, but more embarrassing for you because of the reputation for giving that you already have and which we've told others about.

5. As I just said, that's one reason why I've sent Titus and some of these men ahead, to give you a chance to get your personal donations ready as you started to do a year ago. This will give you time to do that. Also, those who are with me can see for themselves that you did it on your own, without my being there to pressure you.

6. Remember that a person who sows just a few seeds will harvest a very small crop, but a person who sows many seeds will reap a large harvest.

7. Be sure to let each person make up his own mind on how much he should give. In that way, he will be more likely to give something from his heart than from pressure, willingly, rather than reluctantly. Everyone should remember that God loves to see people give gladly and happily, not

grudgingly.

8. And He is able to give you back more than you need, either materially, spiritually, or both, so that you will have enough of everything and may support in abundance every good work.

9. Just as the Scriptures say, "He who gives generously and helps those in need will be remembered forever for his kindness and generosity."

10. Now the One who made the seed for the sower is the same One who makes the seed grow, so we can have bread to eat. He is also the One who will multiply your sowing and increase the harvest of your benevolence.

11. He will continue to bless you in order for you to continue to be a blessing to others. For this, we thank Him.

12. Your donation will not only help relieve the brothers and sisters who are poor, but will also produce an outpouring of thanksgiving from hearts made grateful by what you have done.

13. Furthermore, God will be glorified by your ministry. Your gift is the evidence of your love for your brethren, and it is also evidence of your obedience to the gospel of Christ and of the oneness you have with all your fellow-believers.

14. With deep affection, your brothers and sisters will pray for you and thank God for His gift of grace which they will see working in you.

15. In fact, we all need to thank God for the marvelous gift of His grace.

CHAPTER 10

1. Now I, Paul, want to say something personal to you and to entreat you with Christ's own gentleness and kindness. Some among you are saying that when I'm away from you, I write strong, harsh letters, but when I actually come, I'm as meek and mild as a lamb.

2. But my prayer is that you will not listen to them and force me to take as strong a stand against you as I had to do in my letters. Let me assure you that I will do just that if I have to, particularly against those who say we are acting from worldly motives.

3. It's true that we, too, are sinful

human beings, as you and all other people are. But we don't operate from worldly motives as they do.

4. The weapons we use in our fight for righteousness are not the kind of weapons the world uses. Our weapons come from God, against whom nothing can stand.

5. By God's power, all false arguments are eventually destroyed, and everything that is used by men to set themselves against God is demolished. His power is so great that He can even take hold of a man's thoughts and make him choose to obey Jesus Christ.

6. Obviously, then, if God can do that to those who are against Him, He is well able to correct any disloyalty to Christ among those who belong to Him.

7. What are these people looking at to make them so sure they can stand against me? It's probably my outward appearance, isn't it? And if they think that they can do this and still belong to Christ, let them think again, because if that's the case, then we belong to Christ more than they do.

8. Now another point, why should I be ashamed of my calling and apologize for something the Lord has given me, simply because my responsibility is greater than theirs? The reason the Lord has given some of us greater responsibility is to build you up, not to tear you down.

9. The last thing I would want to do to you is to frighten you with my letters.

10. Some say Paul's letters sound authoritative, but when you talk to him in person, he's quite unimpressive. He's not even a good orator, so don't pay attention to what he says because he's not very logical and doesn't always make sense.

11. Such people better think twice, because we can be just as strong when we are there with you as when we write you letters.

12. Now we don't want any of you to get the idea that we're trying to make ourselves feel good by comparing ourselves with others. Nor do we want you to think by what we say that we're trying to show that we're better than they are. It would certainly show a lack of wisdom and spiritual maturity on our part to

compare ourselves with others and to measure ourselves by what others say and do.

13. Let me assure you that I will not let Satan push me into boasting by telling you things that I have not actually done, and I will not intrude in the work that others have been given to do. These limits have been set by God, and by His grace I will stay within the boundary He has set for me, but this boundary does include you.

14. We have no ambition to do more than we should and we certainly didn't go beyond our bounds of authority when we brought the good news about Jesus Christ to you.

15. You have never heard us compare our work with the work of others for the simple reason that that is not what God has called us to do. However, we do have the right to expect your trust and confidence in God to grow, so we can use your church as a home base to expand the work. All of this is within the boundary of our calling and authority.

16. We want to make your church a home base to carry the gospel to other cities and even to other countries. No one can look at our ministry and say that we're trying to extend our influence and take credit for what others have already done.

17. The Scriptures make this very clear by saying, "If anyone wants to glory, let him not glory in what he has done, but in what the Lord has done."

18. Those who are constantly recommending themselves to others and patting themselves on the back are not sent by God, but those whom God approves and recommends, those are the ones whom He has sent.

CHAPTER 11

1. At this point in my letter, I hope and pray that you will be kind enough as to allow me to be a little foolish and bear with me as I tell you something about myself and how I feel.

2. First of all, I would like you to know that I'm very protective and jealous over you because, when you were baptized, I gave you in marriage as a pure bride to the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. But right now I'm very much concerned that your mind is being turned away from the Lord by Satan in the same subtle way that Eve's mind was in the Garden of Eden.

4. If someone comes to you preaching a different kind of Christ than the One we preached to you, or, if someone tells you about receiving the Spirit which is different from the One you first received, or, if someone gives you a different interpretation of the gospel from the one we gave you, you accept him very readily.

5. Why should you not accept me, then? Now, I don't think I need to take a back seat to those who act like super-apostles.

6. You may think that I'm unskilled in speaking, but even if I am, I am not so in knowledge and in the intelligent handling of Scripture. You should know this by now.

7. I hope I didn't offend anyone by my simple speaking or offend others because I didn't charge for my services. I just hope that I haven't left the impression by doing so, so that what I said wasn't worth much. If it was wrong for me to make myself small in your eyes so you could feel good about yourselves and know that you were important in God's sight, then forgive me.

8. Now I should let you know that I did receive and accept gifts from other churches while I was serving you. This means that in one sense I was robbing them so I could help you.

9. It was back then that I firmly decided not to bother you for help, even when I desperately needed some money to buy a little food. But soon church delegates from Macedonia arrived and brought me all I needed; I didn't have to bother you with my problems and I was glad. I don't ever intend to bother you with my personal needs.

10. As the truth of Christ is in my heart, nobody in all of the province of Greece will stop me from feeling good about what I've done for you.

11. By telling you this, am I saying that when I first came to you I didn't have as much confidence in you as I did in other people? That's ridiculous, because God

knows how much confidence I had in you and how much I loved you. Why? Let me tell you.

12. Now my motive in doing this is to stop those who are making such strong apostolic claims for themselves. They want to be considered equal with us by telling you how much they love you. They claim to be working for you for the same reasons we are.

13. But if they are not willing to sacrifice their lives for you, they are false apostles. They are deceitful with you and are not true workers. They are masquerading as apostles of Christ when they're not. They're taking you for a ride.

14. It shouldn't surprise you that something like this could happen even among Christians. You forget that Satan was once an angel of light and can appear to you still looking like one.

15. So it's no great thing for those who have allowed themselves to be influenced by the evil one to make themselves look like men of right-doing. But in the end, they will reap the consequences of their deeds.

16. I want to say it again, don't let anyone get the idea that I don't know what I'm saying. I may sound a bit arrogant to you, but if that's what you think of me, never mind.

17. I realize that the Lord didn't tell me to say what I'm going to say and that it's my own idea. So I suppose it will sound arrogant to you.

18. But because there are so many who are boasting about what they've done for the church, let me do a little boasting, too.

19. Furthermore, since you listen to fools and let them tell you about all their exploits for the Lord, let me tell you some of mine, and then maybe you'll be able to tell the difference between those who pretend to be apostles and those who really are. So let me present my case.

20. However, before I get started, let me ask you one more question. If you're so wise, why do you put up with the arrogance of those who make such high claims, order you around, take advantage of you, trap you, look down on you, and even slap some of you in the face for disagreeing

with them?

21. Maybe we were too timid and not arrogant enough when we were with you. Maybe we should have done things the same way. Maybe I should humble myself and admit that I was not man enough to do it. Some would like me to say that. How in the world did I let myself get into this kind of self-defense and let myself end up talking this way? But now that I've started in this sarcastic vein, let me go on and be just as arrogant as they are.

22. Are they of Hebrew descent? So am I. Can they claim to be heirs to God's promise to Israel? So can I. Are they descended from Abraham? So am I.

23. Have they accepted Christ as the Messiah and are they now His servants? I must be a real fool to say this, but I serve Christ better than all of them put together. I have worked harder than any of them. I've been whipped for my faith. I've been imprisoned for it. I've been near death more often than I would like to remember.

24. Five times I received at the hands of my countrymen forty lashes minus one.

25. Three times I was beaten with rods by the Romans. Once I was dragged by a mob out of town and stoned and left for dead. I've been in three shipwrecks, and in one of them, I spent all day and all night trying to stay afloat.

26. In my travels, I've been in danger of losing my life from floods, robbers, fellow Jews, not to mention how many times from angry idol worshipers because I took away their business. I've had to face life-threatening situations in cities, in the country, on the high seas, and even be threatened by counterfeit believers.

27. Then there have been the endless hours and days of exhausting work and toil. Often I've been bone-tired and yet gone without rest or sleep. I've been hungry more often than I can remember and I've had my lips crack open for thirst, longing for anyone to give me just one drop of water. Many times I've had no place to stay at night and didn't have enough clothes to keep me warm.

28. In addition to all these outward things, I've had the daily pressure of heart-felt concern for all the members in my

churches.

29. When someone is spiritually weak, don't you think I feel it? When someone slips back into sin, do you think I'm not pained?

30. If I have to tell you everything I've done, then I might as well share with you one incident which will give my enemies a chance to say how helpless and undignified I am.

31. God the Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, bless His name forever, knows that I'm not lying when I tell you this.

32. In my early ministry, when Aretas was in charge of Syria, the governor of Damascus locked the city gates and stationed guards everywhere to catch me.

33. But at the suggestion of my fellow believers, I curled up in a basket and allowed them to lower me to the ground from a small opening in the city wall so I could escape.

CHAPTER 12

1. I shouldn't go on like this, telling you about myself, but now that I've started, I may as well tell you about the visions I've had and the spiritual insights the Lord has given me.

2. Fourteen years ago, I was an ordinary Christian like all of you. Then one day I was taken up to the heaven of heavens to where God is. Now whether I was taken there bodily or just saw it all in vision, I can't tell you. To this day I still don't know. Only God knows.

3. Let me say again, whether I was taken to heaven bodily or just saw it all in vision, I don't know. Only God knows.

4. How it all happened is a mystery, but it did happen. Now while I was there in heaven, the things I saw and heard are impossible to describe or put into words because of the limitation of our human language. How I wish I had the language of heaven, and that you could understand it, then I could better tell you what I saw and heard. But even if this were so, I'm still not allowed to share everything I saw with you.

5. So let me talk about my ordinary self again and let's pretend that what I just

told you didn't even happen to me, but to someone else. Let me go on to tell you about my weaknesses and shortcomings and how far short I fall of your expectations as a minister.

6. Well no, I better stop this and not go on telling you about myself and my experiences, even if they are true. I can see from what I just wrote, that people could say that I'm boasting and that wouldn't be good. I had better stop so that no one will set me up on a pedestal, just because I've been given visions, but I would rather have them accept me for what I am and for what they see in me and hear from me.

7. God knows how naturally subject to pride I am, and to keep me humble and dependent on Him, He has allowed me to continue to be partially blind, which to me is like a thorn in the flesh, and which Satan uses to his advantage to beat my spirit into the ground. Yet this is what keeps me from being so disgustingly independent, which by nature I am.

8. Three times I've pleaded with the Lord about this and asked Him to heal me and give me back my full eyesight. I told Him I needed it to get around and how much better I could function for Him.

9. Each time He said, "My grace is all you need. My power is best seen through dependent people who are aware of their weaknesses. Your handicap will keep you feeling dependent and weak, but that's when you'll be the strongest." So in spite of my pain, I now rejoice in my dependency on the Lord and I'm thankful not only for my handicap, but for all my other physical limitations because, when I'm weak, that's when I'm strong.

10. So as strange as it sounds, I'm thankful for the insults that people throw at me, for the hardships, sufferings, persecutions, and for all the pain and difficulties I've had and still have in my ministry. If people can see Christ and His power in helping me through all these difficulties, instead of seeing me, then the trials are all worth bearing and I praise the Lord for them. When I'm the weakest, that's when I'm the strongest.

11. Well, now that I've talked at length about myself, I feel like a fool for having

said it. How could I have been tricked into talking so much about myself? In one sense, you've forced me into it because, if you had accepted me, I would not have had to tell you all this. Yet I can't blame you for it either. I'm the one who chose to do the boasting and not you. Now I wish I hadn't done it. Because even if I'm nothing in your eyes, the fact still remains that my apostleship is in no way inferior to that of those super-apostles who boast how much they've done.

12. The numerous miracles that I performed while I was working in Corinth should have been proof enough to you of my apostleship, not to mention the kindness with which I treated you.

13. Did I ever treat you as if you were inferior and not as good as other believers? The only thing I can remember as being different is that I decided not to be a burden to you. Forgive me for this wrong! Maybe that's what I should have done!

14. Well, this will be my third visit, and I want to tell you that this next time I'm not planning to make any financial demands of you. After all, children don't usually support their parents, but parents are expected to support their children.

15. So I will gladly spend and be spent for you because you are my children. I will love you more and more, whether you love me or not.

16. I agree that I personally did not burden you. You say that I was not being open with you. That may be true, but I wanted to trap you in God's love as securely as I humanly could by exhibiting His unselfish love for you.

17. Tell me, did I or the men I sent to you ever exploit you?

18. When I asked Titus to go with another Christian brother to see you, did he exploit you? Didn't he act the same way and show the same kind of spirit toward you as I did when I visited you?

19. Now if you happen to think that what I've said so far was defensive, let me tell you that I've been straightforward with you, just as I should be. God is my witness that I opened my heart to you and told you in all honesty what my motives were, and I still stand by you for no other

reason except to help you.

20. However, I'm afraid that when I come, I may find you to be different from what I want you to be, and in turn, I may have to be different from what you want me to be. Yes, I'm afraid I may find quarrels, jealousy, hot tempers, fights, insults, gossiping, arrogance, pride, and general disorder in the church.

21. If that's the case, I'm almost sure that God will give me a sense of remorse and that I'll weep over you and feel guilty, as if all your sins were my own. You can't imagine how grieved I'll be if I find out that you haven't yet repented of your recent drunkenness, impurity, debauchery, and sexual sins in which you so freely engaged before.

CHAPTER 13

1. As I've said before, this is now the third time I am coming to see you. On this visit, everything you tell me must be verified by at least two or three witnesses.

2. As I told you when I was with you the last time, I want to tell you the same thing again in writing. When I come, I will not spare anyone who is still living in sin or any who chose to live in sin since then.

3. If you want proof that Christ is speaking through me, you shall have it. And when He needs to discipline you through me, He will. Christ is not a weakling as some make Him out to be, and He will demonstrate His power through me, if He chooses to do so.

4. Even though Christ may seem weak to some of you because He allowed Himself to be arrested and crucified, yet you need to remember that He's alive and has the full power of God. So when we're in union with Him, we, too, are weak, and yet we are also powerful. While we are very dependent on Him, we are strongly independent toward you as God's power flows through us to help you.

5. Why don't you examine your own lives and take a look at yourselves to see whether you're living the life Christ wants you to live or not. Don't you realize that Christ can live in you just as He can live in me, unless, of course, you've already left Him.

6. Now don't get the idea that we've left Him. We never have, and by His grace never will. In fact, we're more committed to Him now than ever before.

7. We're praying for you that you will do what is right, and I'm not saying this so I can pass your inspection, but that you do what is right because it is right, whether I pass your inspection or not.

8. In the overall picture, no one can do anything against the truth anyway. Anything anybody does will in the end glorify the truth.

9. Actually, we would be glad to have you think of us as weaklings, if that could make you strong in the Lord. Each day we're praying for you to become stronger, so eventually you can stand alone without our help.

10. I'm writing to you ahead of time to see whether or not you will realize what power is available to you and correct your own problems. Then, when I arrive, I won't

have to deal so harshly with you and use the authority the Lord has given me to discipline you. I don't want to tear you down; I want to build you up and see you stand against sin on your own without my being present to help you.

11. And now, my brothers, I have to close and say goodbye. Continue to grow in the Lord so you can stand on your own in the strength that God is so willing to give you. Listen carefully to my appeals and take them to heart. Be agreeable with one another and make an honest effort to be at peace. May the God of love and peace be with you always.

12. Give everyone a brotherly hug for me.

13. Everyone here sends his greetings.

14. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the outgoing love of God our Father, and the presence of the Holy Spirit be felt among you. So be it.

GALATIANS

CHAPTER 1

1. **This** letter is from me, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ. I was not chosen to be an apostle by some group of men, nor was I selected because there was some intrinsic worth in me, but I was called to be an apostle by Jesus Christ Himself. This means that I was called by God the Father, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and gave Him all power in heaven and in earth.

2. The brothers who are here in Rome join me in sending their greetings to all the churches scattered throughout Galatia.

3. We extend to you the grace and peace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,

4. who voluntarily gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from this world of wickedness in which we presently find ourselves. And this was in harmony with the will of God the Father,

5. to whom be glory and honor for ever and ever. So be it.

6. I am amazed that you have so quickly deserted Him who called you and guided you into accepting the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and have turned to another gospel.

7. This other gospel is nothing but a counterfeit. You don't seem to realize that there are some people who are not being led by the same Spirit that you were led by when you were first called. They are distorting the good news about Jesus Christ and are disturbing your confidence in the real message.

8. Let me tell you, if anyone, even an angel from heaven, comes to you and tells you something different from what we preached to you, let him be accursed.

9. I want to repeat what I just said. If anyone preaches a different gospel or brings you a different message than what you received from us, let him be accursed.

10. Does this sound as if I'm trying to persuade you to be loyal to me? Or does it sound as if I'm trying to prove something to God? Do I need to do this? Am I the one who is following popular trends? I hope not. If I tried merely to please people in this way, how could I do that

and continue to be a servant of Jesus Christ?

11. I want to tell you, my brothers, that the good news which I brought to you is not just something I invented.

12. Neither did I pick it up from somebody along the way, nor did someone share it with me. The truth is that it was given to me in vision and revealed to me by Jesus Christ Himself.

13. You've heard the story of my conversion before. So you know how zealous I was for the Jewish faith and how I led out in persecuting the Christians. I showed absolutely no mercy because I was determined to wipe them out.

14. Yes, I showed more zeal for my Jewish faith than anyone else of my age that I know. I was totally committed to upholding the traditions of my ancestors, no matter what the cost.

15. But God had other plans for me even before I was born. In His own time, God called me into the Christian ministry, not because of any goodness in me or because of any merit I had accumulated, but only because of His mercy and grace.

16. What did He have in mind for me and why did He call me? He called me to take the good news about His Son to the Gentiles. But I didn't consult anyone about the gospel.

17. I didn't even go up to Jerusalem to talk with the apostles about it even though they had been called into the ministry by the Lord before I was. I went straight into the Arabian desert and lived there for three years, being taught the gospel by the Lord Himself, and preparing myself for the ministry. Then I returned to Damascus and started preaching.

18. Only after my escape from Damascus, which was more than three years after my conversion, did I go up to Jerusalem. While there, I stayed with Peter for about two weeks.

19. I didn't talk to any of the other disciples, except to James, the Lord's stepbrother.

20. Now what I'm telling you is the truth. As I stand before God, I am not lying.

21. After I saw Peter and James, I left Jerusalem and went back to my hometown of Tarsus in Cilicia.

22. I didn't stop to visit one Christian church in all of Judea, so I had no contact with any of the local leaders.

23. The believers in Judea heard that I, the one who had persecuted them, had embraced the gospel. And they were amazed that now I was preaching the very faith that just a short time before I was so determined to destroy.

24. When they heard this, they glorified God and praised the Lord.

CHAPTER 2

1. I didn't visit Jerusalem again until about fourteen years later. Barnabas went with me, and we took Titus, along, too.

2. I went to Jerusalem only because God told me that He wanted me to go. When Barnabas and I arrived, we met privately with the apostles and leaders of the church, and I told them the kind of gospel I was preaching. I didn't want my ministry to be jeopardized by false reports about what I was teaching.

3. All the while we were in Jerusalem, not one of the apostles or church leaders said anything to us about circumcising Titus whom they knew to be a Greek.

4. We found out later that some Jewish believers, who turned out to be false brethren, had attached themselves to our group, pretending to be Gentile converts. They were like spies trying to find out how much freedom we allowed our Gentile converts. These were the ones who brought up the subject of circumcision and wanted us to require every Gentile convert to be circumcised.

5. But we didn't give in to the demands of this group. We were determined to protect the truth of the gospel and the freedom it gave to you.

6. The apostles had not even suggested that the Gentiles should be circumcised. And even if they had, it would have made no difference to us, because God doesn't change His mind about salvation to accommodate someone else's idea, no matter who they are, whether they're apostles or members.

7. The apostles had no trouble recognizing the fact that God had laid the burden of giving the gospel to the Gentiles on me, just as He had laid on Peter the burden of giving the gospel to the Jews.

8. And the same power that is working in Peter's ministry and helping him to carry out his mission to the Jews, has been working in my ministry, to help me carry the gospel to the Gentiles.

9. Now when the Lord's stepbrother James, together with Peter and John, all three of whom are accepted as being pillars in the church, recognized that God had laid on me the burden to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, they accepted it, and extended to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship. They also agreed that we should carry on our work among the Gentiles just as we've been doing and that they would carry on their work among the Jews just as they've been doing. In other words, they trusted me and promised not to go around inspecting my ministry just as I would not go around to inspect theirs.

10. The only thing they asked of us was to remember the poorer members among us, who had lost everything they had when they became Christians. This we had been doing and were very willing and eager to continue doing.

11. Some time later, Peter came to visit us in Antioch, where I had to confront him publicly because of his behavior. He was acting contrary to what he had told us when we had met with him and James and John in Jerusalem.

12. You see, what happened was that, when Peter first came to Antioch, he ate and fellowshiped with the Gentiles as if there was no difference between them, which is the way it should be. Then, when some men came to town, who claimed they had been sent by James on church business, Peter drew back and kept aloof from the Gentiles as if he didn't want anything to do with them. These men belonged to the group in Jerusalem who wanted us to require all the Gentile converts to be circumcised. Peter was afraid of them, and also didn't want to lose their friendship.

13. Soon the other Jewish converts in

Antioch started acting in the same hypocritical way. In fact, Peter's influence was so strong that even Barnabas was affected.

14. When I saw that the truth of the gospel was at risk, I decided that I had no choice but to confront Peter publicly with the truth. I said to him, "If you as a Jew felt previously free to live and eat with Gentiles, who were not circumcised, why have you suddenly changed and now give the impression that it's wrong for Jews to live and eat with Gentiles unless they are circumcised?" And Peter publicly admitted he was wrong.

15. Now it's true that we were born Jews and that we are not like "Gentile sinners," as some Jews call them.

16. But we also know that we're still sinners, and that no one is put right with God either through circumcision or by meticulously keeping the letter of the law. All of us are saved by faith and confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. No one, Jew or Gentile, can be made right with God simply by going through some ceremonial ritual.

17. And if as Jewish Christians we think that we first have to become sinners like the Gentiles in order to have the same joyful experience of justification as they have, then we're making Christ a promoter of sin! Perish the thought!

18. Or, if I should emphasize the need to keep the ceremonial laws as part of God's plan for us to be saved, then I would be building back up what I've just torn down, and I would not only nullify what Christ has done, but by my dishonesty make myself a transgressor.

19. Now when I, Paul, saw the true meaning of the laws God had given us, and realized that I was dead in sin because keeping the law as a means of salvation was useless, this was good for me because it made me look to Christ as my Savior instead of looking to what I could do.

20. When Christ was crucified, I ended my life with Him. Yet, I'm not dead but very much alive. The life I now live, I live by faith in Christ, the Son of the living God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

21. I have no intention of standing in

the way of God's grace by telling people that they are put right by merely observing and keeping certain laws. If that were so, then Christ's sacrifice is meaningless and His death was useless.

CHAPTER 3

1. Oh, how foolish can you Galatians be! Who put a spell on you to believe such nonsense as having to carry out certain rituals to be put right with God? How could you let go of the truth so easily? Didn't we explain to you what the gospel was all about? Didn't we describe the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary so clearly to you that you could see it as if you were there yourself?

2. Now tell me this one thing: Did the Holy Spirit come into your lives because you were observing the religious rituals of the Jews or because you listened to the gospel and had faith and confidence in what the Lord Jesus Christ had done for you?

3. How can you be so foolish as to believe that after having begun your relationship with God in faith through the power of the Holy Spirit that you could reach spiritual maturity through your own power by observing Jewish rituals?

4. Has all your suffering for Christ, as well as your experience with Him, been for nothing?

5. Is God doing wondrous things for you through the Holy Spirit because you're carrying out certain rituals, or because you believe the gospel and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

6. If you have any doubts about this, then look at the experience of Abraham. Don't the Scriptures tell us that Abraham believed what God said, and because he put his trust in God, God accepted Abraham as one of His own sons?

7. Obviously, God would extend the same opportunity to Abraham's descendants and to those who have the same trust and confidence in God that Abraham had. In fact, these kinds of people are the true descendants of Abraham.

8. The Scriptures, inspired as they are by God, were able to foretell that God would justify the Gentiles because of their

trust and confidence in Him. That's why God said to Abraham, "Through you, all nations of the world will be blest."

9. This means that anyone who relies on God and His promises in the same way that Abraham did will be accepted as one of God's sons, just as Abraham was.

10. But those who depend on their ceremonial observances and on keeping the law for salvation are actually under the condemnation of the law. If you want to live by that rule, then notice what the Scriptures say: "Unless you do everything right all the time as you were told to do by Moses, God cannot accept you as His son."

11. Obviously, no one can be put right with God unless he keeps all the laws perfectly all the time, but that's impossible. Relying on laws and rituals for spiritual power is not the same as relying on God and on His promises for power. According to the Scriptures, "A man who is put right with God will live for God by faith."

12. You can see, then, that rituals of any kind, which are supposed to give you the power you need, are not rooted in faith, but in works. As the Scriptures say, "Whoever will keep all the laws perfectly all the time is the one who will have earned the right to live."

13. Now Christ fulfilled all these ceremonies and kept all the other laws as well. He also took upon Himself the results of our rebelliousness and disobedience, which the law so strongly condemns, and the curse fell on Him. As the Scriptures say, "The Man who is nailed to a tree is stared at by everyone because the curse of sin is upon Him."

14. This happened to Jesus Christ when the curse of sin was placed on Him. So now the spiritual blessings that God promised to Abraham, that have been available to Jews and Gentiles alike, have been secured for us by Jesus Christ. This also means that we receive the promise of the Spirit by faith.

15. Brothers, let me give you an everyday example. Once a man calls a lawyer and makes out a will, no one can change it.

16. Notice that the Scriptures say that God made this kind of an agreement not

with Abraham and his descendants, but with his descendant. In other words, not plural, but singular. This means that God had just one Person in mind when He gave His promise to Abraham. He knew that only this one Person could fulfill the contractual provisions of the law. And that one Person was Jesus Christ.

17. Also notice that the law and God's other instructions were given to Israel four hundred and thirty years after God made the agreement with Abraham, so the law, which was given so many years later, cannot suddenly supersede the agreement, nor make void the promises of God.

18. If God's agreement depended on law-keeping, then it's not really based on promise, but on reward. Yet God blessed Abraham and declared him to be righteous because Abraham believed God and held on to His promise, and not because of what he did to earn it.

19. Then what was the purpose of the law? It was given in addition to the promise to make sure that people would know what wrong-doing was, and curb their evil-doing until the promised One came. Furthermore, even though God, accompanied by thousands of angels, gave our laws to us at Sinai, a human go-between was needed, and that was Moses.

20. But a go-between is not needed when a person makes an agreement with himself. And God made His agreement with Abraham's descendant, that is, with His own Son, so the agreement could be done without angels and without an important human go-between like Moses.

21. Does this mean that the laws given to us at Sinai are contrary to the promises of God? Of course not! But if we had been given laws and rituals which could infuse us with eternal life, then all of us could be saved by simply keeping those laws, and the sacrifice of Christ would not be needed.

22. But the Scriptures tell us that every human being is under the power of sin; so the only solution that can be given is God's solution, which He offers to everyone through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

23. Now before Christ came, we as a nation were protected from ignorant disobedience by the restraints of the law, and

we were guided that way right up until the time of Christ.

24. So the law functioned as a tough old nursemaid who protected us from our own ignorance and willfulness to sin until we as a nation could see the reality of the promise given to Abraham, and that salvation is by faith and not by works.

25. So now that God's promise to Abraham has been shown to be true, we no longer need the law as a nurse maid constantly hovering over us, reminding us of the promise.

26. And because the promise that God made to Abraham has been fulfilled, you are grown-up sons and daughters of God through your faith-union with Jesus Christ.

27. All of you were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. At that time, you publicly accepted the life of Christ as a substitute for your life.

28. No longer does any religious difference come between Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, or between male and female. All of us are on the same spiritual level because of our union with Christ.

29. Now if you belong to Christ, then you belong to Abraham also. This means that you're a true descendant of Abraham without first having to become a Jew. You belong to Abraham through Christ and as such you're entitled to everything that God promised him.

CHAPTER 4

1. Let me continue with my illustration of the child and the nursemaid. Take the case of a son who is legally entitled to his father's properties. How is he treated when he's still a child? He's treated more like a servant. He's told what to do and when to do it. He's not given any kind of authority even though he's the next legal owner.

2. While he's young, he's under the control and supervision of teachers, tutors, and estate managers. They educate him and take care of his personal affairs until the time, set by his father, comes for him to take over.

3. In one sense, the Jewish people were like this son. Even though they had just come out of slavery and were free, they

were still young and very much inclined to sin. They were controlled by the values of this world just as you Gentiles were before you came to Christ.

4. When heaven's clock struck the time for God's Son to be born, He came. He was born of a human mother and subject to Jewish law.

5. He came to redeem the Jewish people and free them from their bondage to sin, and to adopt the Gentiles as His sons. His purpose was to help all of us grow up and become responsible sons and daughters of God.

6. How do we know that the time has come for us to be free from the tutoring of the law? Because the Father has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, so like Christ, we, too, can call Him Father.

7. So we no longer need to be managed as if we were still children having to be tutored and told what is right. Instead we are to act like the adults we are, men and women who can think for themselves. We are to behave like mature sons and daughters of God, and as such we are the legitimate heirs of our Father through Jesus Christ our Lord.

8. Before you knew God as you know Him now, you were the slaves of imaginary gods which didn't even exist.

9. But now that you know God, or more important, now that God considers you His legitimate sons and daughters, you have this wonderful fellowship with Him which no amount of money can buy or rituals produce. Why then would you want to go back and be slaves to religious rites? Do you like to be enslaved that way? Can rituals give you a deeper relationship with God than what you've had?

10. Right now you're giving a saving significance to all kinds of special days, months, seasons, and years.

11. I'm really worried about you. And I'm wondering whether all my work for you has been for nothing.

12. My brothers, I beg you to be one with me in heart and spirit as I am one with you. And right now, don't worry about whether you've hurt me or not. That's not the issue.

13. You remember how close we were

to each other when I first preached the gospel to you? You remember how sick I was?

14. How kind you were to me then. You didn't reject me because of my physical condition and my weakness. But you took care of me as if I were an angel from heaven. You treated me as if I had been sent especially to you with an urgent message from God. In fact, you treated me as if I were Jesus Christ Himself.

15. You were so happy then, always talking about what God had done for you. You were so unselfish that you would have taken out your own eyes, if you could have, and given them to me so I could see better. But what has happened to you?

16. Am I now suddenly become your enemy because I tell you the truth? How could I suddenly turn against you when I suffered so much for you?

17. These other people you're listening to show such a deep interest in you, but it's not for a good purpose. They want to shut you out of the Christian brotherhood so that you will give them your attention and shower them with love as you did me.

18. It's not wrong to shower people with love, if it's for a good reason, whether I'm present to approve it or not.

19. But remember that you're my spiritual children because the Lord used me to give you spiritual birth. So I feel responsible for you. And now I feel these same labor pains coming on again, and they won't stop until I know that Christ is once more born inside of you.

20. I wish I could be there with you now and change my worried tone of voice, because I love you and am really concerned about you.

21. Let me ask those of you who are keeping the law as a means of salvation, do you really understand what the law is telling you?

22. Listen to me. The Scriptures tell us that Abraham had two sons. One was born of a servant-woman and the other one was born of his wife, a free woman.

23. The son of the servant-woman was brought into the world by Abraham's own efforts, but the son of his wife, a free

woman, was conceived by a miracle. This happened through the power of God because He had promised Abraham that he and his wife would have a child of their own.

24. This whole experience is filled with meaning. Each of the two women represent two different views of salvation. The first view is symbolized by Hagar, the servant-woman, and represents what happened at Sinai when our forefathers promised God they would do everything He asked by our own human efforts.

25. Hagar's experience with Abraham not only represents the unrealistic promises we made to God at Sinai, but also represents the earthly city of Jerusalem as it still slavishly attempts to keep the law as a means of salvation.

26. Now Abraham's wife was a free woman, and she represents the heavenly Jerusalem, which is a free city, and we belong to this city because she is our real mother.

27. As the Scriptures say, "Jerusalem, you have been like a childless woman. But sing and shout for joy because soon you will feel the pains of childbirth coming upon you. You will have more spiritual children than the woman who has a husband and has had many children."

28. My brothers, you are God's children as a result of His power, and not your own efforts. You were born into God's family through a miracle, just as Isaac was miraculously conceived and born into Abraham's family.

29. That's true for all of us. You will notice in Abraham's experience that the son born through human effort persecuted the son who was born to Abraham and Sarah through the power of the Spirit.

30. What else do the Scriptures tell us about all this? "Send the servant-woman and her son away, because her son has no right to be an heir and receive Abraham's blessings along with the son conceived by his wife."

31. My brothers, we are not children of a servant-woman picked out by Abraham. Instead, we are children of his true wife who was a free woman, and this was the marriage that God approved of because

He miraculously helped her conceive and bear a son.

CHAPTER 5

1. Since Christ has set us free and sealed our freedom, then let us stand as free people and make our own decisions without letting others entangle and enslave us by all kinds of unnecessary rituals.

2. Listen to me; this is Paul speaking to you. I'm telling you that if you allow yourself to be circumcised for the reasons we've discussed, then what Christ has done for you means absolutely nothing.

3. I'm trying desperately to get across to you that if anyone allows himself to be circumcised as a means of salvation, then he's on a track that obligates him to keep all the other ancient rituals spelled out by the law.

4. If any of you do that, then you've cut yourself off from God's salvation through Jesus Christ. You who would seek to save yourself by keeping the law have stepped outside the sphere of God's grace.

5. As for us, our confidence is in the Lord. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we will continue to depend on what Christ has done for us to put us right with God.

6. Christ's love for us doesn't depend on whether we've been circumcised or not. The thing that matters most to Him is that we show our faith in Him by living the kind of life that He lived.

7. And this is the kind of life you were living until now, one that made you bubble over with happiness. You were running the gospel race well. But who are those who came along and tripped you up by persuading you to live contrary to the gospel?

8. This new light certainly did not come from God. He was the One who called you to live the life of Christ in the first place.

9. As you know, it takes only a little bit of yeast to affect a whole batch of dough.

10. But I still have confidence in the Lord that you will hold on to the gospel. Under no circumstances should you let go of the gospel truth, no matter who tells you differently. God in His own way will take care of the people who started all this,

whoever they are.

11. Some folk are telling you that I expect all my converts to be circumcised. If that were so, then why am I being persecuted by those who insist on circumcision? Why is my preaching the cause of all my troubles?

12. If those who are bothering you with their insistence on circumcision would follow their logic, then they should castrate themselves, because if a little cutting of the flesh is good and supposedly pleases God, then more cutting should be better.

13. My brothers, you have been called to be free men and women in Jesus Christ. The only restriction that God has put on you is that you don't abuse your freedom by using it to fulfill the desires of your sinful human nature. God freed you from the powerful controls of sin so that you would be free to choose to live the life of Christ, loving and serving others.

14. That's really what the law of God is all about when it says, "You should love your neighbor as you love yourself."

15. If you keep on acting as animals, snapping and snarling at each other, you'll end up destroying one another.

16. Let the Holy Spirit direct your lives. When you do this, you won't want to spend your energy to satisfy the desires of the flesh.

17. Remember that you can't depend on the dictates of your depraved human nature to tell you what to do, because what it wants you to do is different from what the Holy Spirit wants you to do. The desires of our depraved human nature and the desires of the Holy Spirit are not the same thing. They are like two powerful forces pulling in opposite directions. That's why you can't always depend on the fact that what you personally want to do is the right thing to do.

18. In all of this, one thing is sure. If the Holy Spirit is leading you, you won't be led to depend on keeping the law as a means of salvation.

19. If the Spirit is not leading you, you will be left to the devices of your depraved human nature, and its by-products are well known. Some of these by-products are filthy language, immorality, wickedness,

and debauchery, just to mention a few.

20. But it doesn't end there. Other by-products include worshiping idols, mixing magic potions, delving into spiritism and witchcraft, hatred, strife, jealousy, rage, hostility, selfishness, dissensions, and playing politics for one's own end. And I could go on and on.

21. People who are controlled by their depraved human nature are proud and jealous, and under the influence of liquor, indulge in all kinds of immorality and sexual perversions. They also do all sorts of other things which I'm not going to take time to mention because you already know what they are. Let me tell you again that those who live that way and do those things will not have a part in God's kingdom.

22. Now the by-product of the Spirit is totally different. You can easily see this for yourself, because His product is love, joy, peace, patience, endurance, kindness, gentleness, compassion, goodness, faithfulness, loyalty, dependability,

23. teachableness, self-imposed discipline for the sake of others, and wholesome and healthful living. There is no law against such things. Quite to the contrary, the laws in the Scriptures emphasize the importance of this kind of fruit. If those who are telling you to be circumcised are in harmony with God, then why isn't this fruit seen in their lives?

24. Those who belong to Christ are not controlled by their perverted human nature, because they nailed it to the cross.

25. But since we're living under the control of the Holy Spirit and by His power, then let us live the way the Holy Spirit wants us to live.

26. This means don't hold too high an opinion of your own ability or of your accomplishments; don't do things to bring out anger or resentment in others; don't have shameful longings for the possessions, success, or riches of others; and don't begrudge others their talents because you're not as talented as they are.

CHAPTER 6

1. **Brothers**, if one of you is overcome by temptation, then those who are spiritually mature should help to bring him back

to the Lord. When you do this, keep in mind that you, too, can be overcome by temptation.

2. If someone is carrying a heavy burden and is about to give up, help him carry his emotional overload, and in this way you'll be doing what Christ Himself would do.

3. And if someone thinks that he's somebody when he's really nobody, he's just fooling himself.

4. Each one should evaluate his own conduct. If it's good, he'll feel content with himself and with what he's done, and he won't have to go around comparing himself with others all the time.

5. In the final analysis, everyone is responsible for his own conduct and has to carry his own load.

6. Now those who are being taught the gospel should share with their teacher the good things they have, as long as their teacher is sharing with them the good things he has.

7. And the Lord will help you to tell the good teachers from the bad ones. No one can fool God. Whatever a man sows, that he will reap.

8. If a man invests his time and energy in fulfilling the desires of the flesh, he'll reap for himself spiritual decay and eternal death. But if he invests his time and talents in what the Holy Spirit wants, then he'll reap spiritual strength and eternal life.

9. Let's not become tired of doing good. If we don't get discouraged and give up, the time will come when we'll reap the harvest.

10. We should be kind to everyone, especially to our fellow Christians.

11. Now I want you to notice the change in handwriting. The reason it's larger is because I'm writing these closing remarks with my own hand.

12. Those people who are trying to force you to be circumcised are most likely doing it to be popular with the Jews and to avoid being persecuted by them. That's why they feel they can't come right out and say that Christ doesn't require circumcision or they'd be in trouble with the Jewish zealots.

13. By the way, have you noticed that

those who urge you to be circumcised are not consistent? Many of them don't keep the ceremonial laws themselves. Why then are they putting so much emphasis on the importance of circumcision? They not only want to avoid persecution, but they also like to boast about how many people they've won to Judaism.

14. As far as I'm concerned, my boasting will continue to be about the Lord Jesus Christ. My interest in status-seeking was killed when I accepted Christ's death on Calvary, and ever since then, I've had absolutely no interest in pushing my own reputation.

15. I realize the religious and political implications of me making this statement, but I could care less whether a person is circumcised or not. What really matters to

me is whether he's been re-created in Jesus Christ and is a different person from what he was before.

16. Those who focus on the Lord Jesus Christ and on living His life will receive God's blessing, His peace, and His mercy.

17. In finishing this letter, let me say this. From now on I don't want anyone to bring this subject of circumcision up again. And I don't want anyone to stir up any more trouble over it, and that's final. I have scars all over my body from beatings I received to bring you the pure gospel. That should prove to anyone who has any questions about me precisely where my loyalties are and to whom I belong.

18. Dear brothers, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. So be it.

EPHESIANS

CHAPTER 1

1. **This** letter is from Paul, who was selected by God to serve as an apostle of Jesus Christ. It's a letter intended for church members everywhere, who against all odds, are faithful to Christ.

2. I want to extend God's favor to you and to reassure you of Christ's continual love.

3. We express our gratitude to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for all the spiritual benefits and privileges that come to us from the heavenly world, and we receive these blessings because of the love of the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. In His heart, God sent His Son to come down and save us from our sins, even before He created us. He knew we would sin, but He wanted us to be holy and blameless so we could stand before Him without fault and be a permanent part of His universal family.

5. So it was out of love that He destined us to be with Him and to be His children through the salvation process which He initiated through our Lord Jesus Christ.

6. This whole process of salvation reveals God's glorious grace, which He showers upon us through His beloved Son.

7. Through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, we have forgiveness and acceptance, which shows to everyone the riches of God's grace and how kind and merciful He really is.

8. And we rejoice in His grace which He has so mercifully lavished upon us.

9. Also, He further shows us the kindly Person He really is by sending us the Holy Spirit to clear up any misunderstandings we might have about Him, and by giving us insight into the mystery of His will.

10. His plan is to unite the whole universe as one family and to execute His plan through Jesus Christ our Lord. Included in this plan are all created beings in heaven and on earth.

11. It is through the Father's gift of Christ that we have this hope. That's the way He decided to do it, and what He does, He does not for Himself, but for the

best interest of His children.

12. We who have placed our hope in Christ recognize our destiny and live for the praise of His glory.

13. You also have placed your hope in Christ, and God has placed His seal on you because you believed in His Son, and He has given you the Holy Spirit in your hearts as a sign of ownership and the certainty of final salvation.

14. And the presence of the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it. For this world is owned by God and continues to be under His gracious rule.

15. **Now** when I hear of your confidence in Christ and how much you love and care for each other,

16. I can't stop giving thanks to God for all of you. I pray that this joy and exuberance which you have will never end, but will continue to be a blessing to everyone you meet.

17. Also, I pray that God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, will continue to give you wisdom and reveal more of Himself to you as the days go by.

18. I want your hearts to expand with love and joy over what God in Christ has done for you. I want your faith and confidence in Him to grow stronger each day. I want your hope in the future to grow brighter and brighter as you look forward to what He has in mind for you.

19. God's love for us is amazing and almost beyond belief as we see His power changing the lives of people everywhere.

20. It was this same power that enabled Christ to do what He did and then raised Him from the dead to be seated on the right hand of God in the Heaven of Heavens.

21. This places Christ above all governments, rulers, and powers. He is so trustworthy that God has given Him a title that is higher than any title in this world or in the next. He is Lord and King, not only now, but for eternity.

22. This means that God has put Christ not only in charge of the things of this world, but also in charge of the church.

23. And Christ and His church are one because it's His body. Yes, the church is the human body of the One who fills the whole universe with His presence.

CHAPTER 2

1. It was the power of Christ that was seen in your lives when you were raised from spiritual death to spiritual life. Before that, you were not only spiritually dead because of the original sting of human sin, but also because of your own sins.

2. You were following the course of this world by listening to the promptings of the prince of this world. That is, you lived according to the spirit of this age as seen in the lives of those who are disobedient.

3. We've all felt Satan's wicked influence over us. We've felt it in our bodies as well as in our minds. Our nature was full of sinful cravings. We were controlled by selfishness and pride and were on the road to self-destruction.

4. But because of His love for us, God, who is so full of compassion and understanding,

5. gave us a new life, a new beginning in Christ, and He did this while we were still living in sin and were spiritually dead. This action toward us was totally unmerited, so that we are saved by grace and by grace alone.

6. And now that we've been born again, we are spiritually present with Him in the heaven of heavens and sit with Him at the very center of power.

7. In all future ages, we will be living witnesses to the graciousness, goodness, and love of God revealed to us through Jesus Christ, who came to redeem us and to die for our sins.

8. Therefore, you can see that because of God's initiative and through His grace we are saved, and not because of any natural goodness or any kind of works on our part. All of what we receive is a gift from Him to us.

9. It certainly has nothing to do with what we ourselves did to earn it. And in the light of this, all boasting is forever silenced.

10. Every good thing we do and every-

thing we are is the product of God's creative power administered to us through Jesus Christ. And Christ wants us to live out God's love for others just as He did when He was here.

11. Do you remember how you were once called the uncircumcised Gentiles who didn't know God? You were called this by those who were circumcised and considered themselves to be God's representatives.

12. It was wrong for them to say this about you and to look down on you like that, but in one sense, what they said was true. You didn't know God as you know Him now. You were like foreigners who had not yet become citizens of God's spiritual kingdom. You were totally ignorant of the agreement that God had made with His Son to redeem the human race. And this meant that you were living outside of God and without hope.

13. But things have changed since you've heard the good news about God's love for the human race, which was shown to us in the life and death of His Son.

14. And by His death for all of us, Christ has also done away with the antagonism that existed between Jews and Gentiles. He is the One who brought us peace. He is the One that brought us together in love and broke down the wall of prejudice that had been built up between us.

15. He is the One who did away with the hatred that separated us because of the many misapplications of the Scriptures. But now we have a new relationship with each other and it's all because of Him.

16. It was Christ's purpose to bring us together and then present us to God as His brothers, with all the differences between us gone. And He brought our hostility to an end through the cross.

17. He came preaching peace to you and to everyone, both Jew and Gentile alike.

18. In Christ we are all one and have equal access through the Holy Spirit to the Father.

19. This means you're no longer strangers and foreigners living outside of God and without hope. Because of Jesus Christ, you're now citizens of God's kingdom

together with all committed believers everywhere and all loyal beings throughout the universe, all of whom make up God's wonderful family.

20. Or to use another analogy, you're like living stones of a beautiful temple brilliantly reflecting the love of God. You have been carefully and securely laid on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, who in turn are cemented to Jesus Christ, the one great Cornerstone.

21. Now, this structure of living people, of which you and I are a part, is growing into a beautiful and holy temple of gratitude and praise to our Lord Jesus Christ.

22. It is through Christ that each one of you is an individualized part of this living human temple, in which God through His Holy Spirit already lives.

CHAPTER 3

1. It was because I preached the good news about what Jesus Christ has done for you, that I was arrested and imprisoned.

2. Now I assume that you have heard about how God commissioned me to bring you the good news of salvation,

3. and how this was made known to me by revelation, which I wrote about before.

4. So when you read my letter, you can better understand my insight into the mystery of Christ.

5. Now before Christ came, people didn't understand some things, but these things about Christ have now been made evident by the Holy Spirit through God's appointed apostles and prophets.

6. The message to you is that you as Gentiles should be part of the same spiritual body with the Jews. You are equally favored by God through His plan of salvation, because all of us are saved through Jesus Christ.

7. I'm only a servant of Christ, equipped by Him to share the good news with you according to the empowering grace of God, which never stops working for us.

8. I consider myself to be the least deserving of all of God's people. Yet, God spoke even to me, and then on top of it, commissioned me to take the good news

to you and to share with you the spiritual riches we have in Christ.

9. I'm supposed to share this good news not only with you, but with all the Gentiles everywhere. What God has done for us through Christ is not some strange or mysterious plan. This plan was the Father's intention from the very beginning when He and Christ created us, before we ever rebelled against Him, but it was never fully understood.

10. But we are vindicating God's plan. If the plan didn't work, it wouldn't be a wise plan. But through the church, the wisdom of God is made known in the heavenly worlds, and the whole universe understands God now, as they've never understood Him before.

11. This was according to His eternal plan and He accomplished His purpose for us through His Son Jesus Christ.

12. Therefore, it is through Jesus Christ that we have our birthright and our right of access to the Father, and we can exercise that right with full confidence.

13. So don't get discouraged and give up your faith because of my arrest and imprisonment. You're precious in God's sight because of the great faith you have in Him.

14. For this I bow in gratitude and praise before the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

15. And because of what our Father did through Jesus Christ, the entire universe is like one great family. That's why we can rightly call ourselves God's children.

16. This includes you. You, too, are God's children. Through the Holy Spirit, your Father is doing all He can to enrich your faith even more, and to strengthen you to remain loyal sons and daughters of God, no matter what the cost.

17. I pray that Jesus Christ will continue to live in your hearts by faith and that your love for Him will be rooted in His love for you.

18. The more you love Christ, the more you will understand the breadth and length and depth and height of the love of God.

19. However, to fully know how much God loves us and cares about us is beyond human comprehension. Yet it is something each one of you can experience until

your hearts overflow with love for Him.

20. Through the Holy Spirit, God will do this for you and give you an experience that is beyond what you can imagine or even say or think. I know, because of what He has done for me and because of the experiences I've had with Him.

21. Now to God and to Jesus Christ belong all the praise in the church for what is happening. And so be it throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

1. My appeal to you is to live for Jesus Christ, even though what I'm telling you has put me in jail. I want you to stick to what you believe no matter what happens.

2. But I want you to do so humbly and quietly, being patient and kind toward each other.

3. Worship God in peace, stay united, and be guided by the Holy Spirit.

4. You need to remember that the only kind of fellowship is the fellowship into which we are led by the Holy Spirit, who gives us one and the same hope.

5. There is only one Lord, one kind of faith, and one baptism that has any meaning.

6. There is only one God. He is the Father of all of us, and the One who is above all and in you all. That's what gives us our fellowship and keeps us together.

7. Now God has graciously given to everyone of us gifts from Christ.

8. These gifts He promised to give us after Christ completed His work and ascended to heaven. You see, Christ took to heaven with Him some humans who were raised from the dead at the time of His own resurrection as living trophies of His victory over sin and death.

9. This isn't strange at all, because His resurrection from the dead and His ascension up to heaven is no different than His coming down from heaven and being born a human being.

10. The point is that He who became one of us has ascended and been given a place next to God and put in charge of everything in heaven and on earth to complete God's plan of salvation.

11. To do this, Christ through the Holy

Spirit gave us the gifts that God had in mind to give us. Each gift carries with it its own responsibility. Some of us were given the burden of being apostles, others the responsibility of the prophetic office, still others the task of being evangelists, and yet others the care of being pastors or teachers.

12. These are just a few of the many gifts God has given us. But all the gifts are given for one and the same purpose, to encourage the church to fulfill its destiny by carrying out its mission.

13. This means that the gifts are to help us to press together, to treasure our mutual faith, and to motivate us to grow up and to act as mature believers should. We know that God gives us these gifts because He wants us to be more and more like His Son, and these gifts will help us to do just that.

14. These gifts will also keep us on course, so we're not blown this way and that way by every wind of doctrine or theological fad that comes along. These kinds of tricky, doctrinal winds will always blow, because there will always be human beings who love to be popular and to have a following of loyal supporters. That's all that seems to be important to them.

15. But we have shared with you the true teachings of God, and this is the same truth that Christ wants you to share with others. This is the truth that will keep you growing, and your dispositions and attitudes will become more and more like His.

16. As I said before, the truth about our God and His Son Jesus Christ is what holds us all together. We're like parts of Christ's body. In one sense, His body is only as strong and healthy as the strength the individual muscles and sinews bring to it. This is why God gave us these gifts. He wants us to be able to bring strength to the work so the church can grow and build itself up in love.

17. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I appeal to you not to live as the Gentiles do who have completely different values and a completely different view of things.

18. They don't see things the way we do. Their minds are darkened and they're

alienated from the life that is found in God because of their willing ignorance and the hardness of their hearts.

19. They've lived a life of greed and undisciplined passions, and what you see is the result of just such a life.

20. This is totally different from the kind of life I've taught you to live or from the kind of selfless life that Christ lived.

21. If you've been taught the right way to live and Christ gave you an example of how to live,

22. then you need to get rid of the old life. That life was nothing but corrupt and deceitful, to say the least.

23. Every day you need to begin with a commitment to live a new life and to live it for Christ. Each day you need to be renewed in your mind and determine anew to live totally different from the way you lived before.

24. This is what it means to be a new person in Christ, one who has been recreated to live righteously and godly as He did.

25. Therefore, stop being untruthful with each other, but be open and honest in everything you do because we are all members of the same family.

26. If you get upset, don't focus on your feelings until they grow to be hateful. Don't let your frustrations and anger degenerate into sin.

27. Don't keep nursing your upset after sundown and give the devil a foothold in your life.

28. If a man used to rob and steal to make a living, he should stop it. Let him get a job, pay back what he took, and help those in need.

29. Watch what you say so you don't go around hurting people. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only that which is good. Impart grace to others by talking courage and faith and hope as fits the occasion.

30. Don't hurt the Holy Spirit or drive Him away because He's the only One who can keep you safe until God's plan of salvation for this world is completed.

31. Stop being bitter and angry all the time. Stop your gossiping, your insults, and nursing your hateful feelings.

32. Instead, be kind and compassionate to one another, considerate and forgiving, just as Christ would be if He were here.

CHAPTER 5

1. In other words, imitate Christ as God's children should.

2. Walk in love and be willing to expend yourself for others as Christ did. This makes your heavenly Father happy because He loves everyone, and He wants you to do the same.

3. Free sex, filthy living, or greedy politics should have absolutely no place in your life, and it certainly is totally unbecoming to a people who are heading for heaven.

4. Also filthy language, irresponsible conversations, tearing people down, and always criticizing everybody and everything has no place in your lives. What you should talk about is how grateful you are for what God and others have done for you, how they've helped you, and how they've blest your lives.

5. All this is important because we know that no one practicing free sex, who lives a filthy life, whose whole mindset is one of greed, or who makes everything more important than the life that God has in mind for him to live can go to heaven. In no way can he have part in the kingdom of Christ and of His Father.

6. Don't let anyone get you off the track and deceive you with empty words. You can see the kind of life that others live when God is not in the picture, and it is because of their disobedience that they will reap His final displeasure with sin.

7. Don't accept invitations to places where they do the things I just mentioned.

8. Once you did some of these same things because you were in darkness, but now you're different because you're in the light, so you need to live as people of the light, which you are.

9. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is goodness, right-doing, and honesty in all things.

10. This is the kind of fruit that God wants to produce in your life, with your help and your consent.

11. Don't get involved with people who are trying to get you to do what they're

doing and pull you back into a life which has no hope and which produces no heavenly fruit.

12. It's not even right to talk about the filthy lives of these people and what they do, much less do it yourself.

13. But all things are seen for what they are when exposed to the light. And the kind of life you live silently rebukes the way they live.

14. That's why the Scriptures say, "Wake up and act as though you're alive in Christ and not half dead. And Christ will give you more light so you can shine even brighter."

15. So don't be foolish. Pay attention to how you live, using the wisdom that God has given you.

16. Take advantage of every opportunity to do good because there will always be plenty of opportunities to do otherwise.

17. Don't be caught napping, but think about what God has in mind for you and then do it.

18. Whatever else you do, don't get drunk because you'll lose your self-respect and end up doing things that you normally wouldn't do. If you want excitement, get excited about what God has done and about what He's doing.

19. Start singing and praising God and you'll not only encourage yourself, but others as well; I've even done it in jail and I know it works.

20. Develop an attitude of gratitude and always give thanks to our God and Father for everything, doing so in the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

21. **Also** show a submissive spirit one to the other for Christ's sake.

22. This not only applies to you when you're at church, but also when you're at home. Wives should respect and honor their husbands, for this is according to the rule of Christ.

23. Husbands should respect and honor their wives just as Christ respects and honors the church, doing all He can for her.

24. Just as the church relates to Christ and responds to His love and affection, so should wives relate to their husbands, who love and care about them.

25. Husbands, on the other hand, need to love and care about their wives as Christ loved and cared about the church, so much so that He gave His life for her.

26. He promised the Father that He would do this, first of all by cleansing us from sin which is symbolized by our baptism, and then by giving us power to live by His word.

27. He wants to have for Himself a gloriously beautiful church, not having one spot of selfishness or wrinkle of sin. He wants a church in which the members are walking in His steps and living beautiful lives, modeled after His selfless innocence.

28. That's how husbands should relate to their wives and that's the kind of women our wives should be. Husbands should care about their wives as they care about themselves. In one sense, when a husband cares about his wife, he's actually caring about himself, because the two of them are one.

29. Have you ever heard of a normal person hating his own body? I never have. People usually watch out for themselves and take good care of their bodies. In the same way, Christ watches out for Himself by taking care of the church, because the church is His body; it's an extension of Himself here in this world.

30. And since each of us is a part of Christ's body, we ought to care about each other as we should.

31. Now the proper function of a husband is seen in his initial act of leaving his father and mother for the sake of his wife, whom he then treats as part of himself.

32. Such a genuine union is really a mystery and beyond human comprehension. It's hard to put all this down in words, whether I'm trying to explain to you Christ's relationship to the church or the relationship of a man to a woman.

33. What I'm trying to say is that every one of you men who are married should love and care about your wives as you care about yourselves, and that you women who are married should respect and appreciate having this kind of a husband.

CHAPTER 6

1. Children, obey your parents, if

they're in the Lord, because that's the thing to do.

2. Respect your parents whether they're Christians or not, because that's the commandment to which God has attached a special promise.

3. When you do this, you'll see how much happier you'll be. Life will be better for you, and you'll even live longer.

4. Fathers, don't mistreat your children and make them angry at you, but treat them as little adults and members of God's family. Instruct your little ones and discipline them to fit them for service, because that's what the Lord does for you.

5. Servants, obey your masters and do it respectfully. Give priority to the happiness and well-being of others, no matter who they are and in whatever situation you find yourself in.

6. Don't do your work only when someone's watching you. You're not out to please men, but to please God, so you need to work from the heart as unto the Lord.

7. Have a good attitude and have a spirit that says, "We're working for the Lord!"

8. We know that whatever work you're in, doing it for the Lord will make a difference. This approach not only makes life much easier now, but the results will be seen throughout eternity. It doesn't matter so much what kind of work you do, as how and why you do it.

9. Masters, have the same attitude toward those who are your servants as if they are your own brothers. Don't keep threatening to kill them for every little thing they do wrong. Do you do everything right? Of course not. Who does? You need to realize that you, too, have a Master. Does he threaten to kill you for every little mistake you make? No! He treats you kindly as He does everyone else.

10. **Finally**, let me say to all of you: Be strong in the Lord and stand in the power He gives you.

11. Put on every piece of spiritual armor that you can. The Lord has provided you with all the sophisticated weaponry you need to detect the enemy and to confront him.

12. You see, we're not dealing with things we can see or get our hands on, but with beings in the spiritual world who were once near the center of power, but who are now trying to rule this world. And the power of this supernatural force is not to be underestimated.

13. That's why I'm telling you to put on every piece of spiritual armor God is offering you so at the end of the battle, you'll still be standing. Put on the whole armor, not just part of it, and then stand firm, not giving an inch of ground.

14. Now is the time to decide to stand. Take the belt of truth and tie it tightly to yourself. Cover your chest with the breastplate of Christ's invincible righteousness.

15. Put on the shoes of the good news of peace.

16. Above all else, don't forget to use the protective shield of faith, trusting in the Lord, because there's nothing else like it to stop the arrows which Satan sends your way.

17. Last but not least, put on the helmet of the joy of salvation to cover your head. Then take hold of the sword of the Scriptures, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, use it.

18. Finally, pray as if your life depended on it. Keep an eye out for your brothers and sisters. Don't live just for yourself. Say a prayer for them as they also put on the armor and fight the good fight of faith.

19. And pray for me, too, that God will give me the right words to say when I'm standing before Caesar. Pray that in the meanwhile He will help me not to be afraid to share the gospel with all who come to visit me, even if they work in Caesar's palace and their witness to the gospel leads to my conviction.

20. After all, I am an ambassador of the Lord, the only difference being that I'm in chains. I represent His kingdom, so I should speak in defense of it, and do so unashamedly.

21. However, so you'll know more about the conditions I face here and how I am, I decided to send Tychicus to you. You'll love him as soon as you meet him. You can trust him, for he's a good brother and a faithful minister of God.

22. In fact, he'll soon be on his way. He'll be making a few other stops, but he'll be with you shortly. He'll tell you all about me and my conditions here, as well as encourage you by sharing the courage which God has given me.

23. Peace be with all of you. Remem-

ber that the love our Father has for you is seen and understood in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

24. Now may God's grace continue to be with you, and in turn may you continue to love the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart. May it ever be so. Amen.

PHILIPPIANS

CHAPTER 1

1. **Greetings** from Paul and Timothy, who are the willing servants of Jesus Christ. This letter is meant for all those in the city of Philippi who are set aside to live a holy life, including their elders and deacons.

2. Grace be to all of you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Every time I think of you, I thank God for all of you.

4. Every time I pray, I pray for you and I do so joyously. I ask God to bless you even more abundantly than He has already.

5. I've enjoyed your fellowship in the gospel from the first day you became Christians until now.

6. And I'm confident that the good work God started in you He will continue until the day you meet Jesus Christ.

7. You'll always be close to my heart, and it's not wrong for me to feel this way about you. I'll never forget how you shared yourselves with me and helped me to carry out my duties as an apostle. In those days I was free to go anywhere I wanted to, to defend the gospel, but now my freedom is gone.

8. God is my witness that my attachment to you and my deep longing for you comes from the bottom of my heart. This love I have for you came from Christ Himself.

9. I pray that the affection you have for one another will become deeper and stronger, and that it will expand more and more as you grow in knowledge and judgment.

10. The Holy Spirit will help you to choose what is good. He will also help you to grow in sincerity and commitment, and to live blameless lives until the day you personally meet Jesus Christ.

11. I want you to be filled with the Holy Spirit and produce all the good qualities that your continued relationship with Jesus Christ can possibly produce. This will not only bring honor to God, but will bring Him the recognition that He so rightly deserves.

12. **Now** my brothers, I want you to understand that the things that have recently happened to me have helped, not hindered, the spread of the gospel.

13. My imprisonment for Christ has been instrumental in carrying the gospel right into Caesar's palace and into many other neighborhoods in Rome.

14. Many of our brothers in the Lord have become bold and more confident of their faith because of my imprisonment. They preach the gospel courageously and without fear.

15. Unfortunately, some are motivated to preach Jesus Christ because it either gives them a sense of power or they like to be in the thick of anything that's controversial. But there are those who preach Christ out of good will and with genuine concern for people.

16. They preach the gospel sincerely and with love for others, wanting to see them saved and in the kingdom. That's why I'm in prison, because I preached that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ.

17. But, as I said, others preach Christ to unsettle people's faith, and even use the gospel as a platform from which to promote their own ideas. These kinds of people seem to delight in making things harder for me. If they keep stirring things up, it puts Christians in a bad light, and soon the government will classify all of us as troublemakers.

18. But it doesn't matter, even though some of these preachers are not genuine. What really matters to me is that Christ is being preached, whether it is in pretense or in truth, and in this I do rejoice.

19. I don't have a doubt that even my imprisonment will turn out to the good of the gospel, not because of me, but because of your prayers and the powerful working of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

20. When I'm brought before Caesar for trial, I will not be ashamed of the gospel. I will testify about Jesus Christ just as sincerely and boldly as I've done everywhere else I've been. I will continue to magnify Jesus Christ whether Caesar releases me or not.

21. For me to be released means more opportunities to magnify Jesus Christ; to be executed means that I will magnify Christ even more by my death than I have magnified Him by my life.

22. If I could release myself, I would go right back to work to produce more fruit for the Lord, but I don't have that choice.

23. So I've been wrestling with mixed emotions. On the one hand, I would rather be executed and in the next moment of consciousness see Christ, which is much better than staying here in this old world.

24. On the other hand, to be released and to continue to help you is more important than for me to be with Christ.

25. However, I want you to know that my personal choice is to be released and stay here, so I can continue to help you and have the joy of seeing you grow stronger and stronger in the faith.

26. I already know how you'll respond when I come to see you. You'll be so glad, and together we'll encourage each other to learn even more about the Lord.

27. **But** in the meanwhile, continue to be good citizens, living as people who have been changed by the gospel of Christ, whether I see you again or not. In your next report, I also want to hear that you're standing together as one man, all having the same spirit of commitment, and the same determination to be loyal to Christ.

28. And I want to hear that you're not being intimidated by your adversaries, who are constantly accusing you of being wrong about the salvation you have through Christ. What they're doing is an indication of their own future destruction, but for you it is a sign that you'll be saved and given eternal life by God Himself.

29. This experience you're going through will be a real strengthening of your faith. Not only did God give you an opportunity to be saved by believing on Christ, but now He's giving you an opportunity to test your love for Him by letting you suffer.

30. This is not something strange. It simply means that you'll be going through the same conflicts and struggles I've been going through for years, some of which you personally witnessed when I was

jailed in your own city, and now I'm jailed in Rome.

CHAPTER 2

1. If you want to console my spirit, continue to grow in your relationship with Christ. If you want to comfort me, show me that you love one another, that you're enjoying the fellowship of the Spirit, and that you're merciful and compassionate to others.

2. If you want to make me completely happy, be like-minded, show the same love to everyone, and be one in spirit and purpose.

3. However, don't do this because you want to make a name for yourself, but do it with an attitude of dependence on God and gratitude for what He has done for you. Appreciate the gifts the Holy Spirit has given to other believers, and don't think you're the only one who has the answers.

4. And don't become totally absorbed in your own spiritual growth, but take an interest in other people and help them to grow, too.

5. You need to have the same attitude toward people that Jesus Christ had.

6. From all eternity, Christ had the very nature of God. But it never entered His mind to show off His power to the whole universe so they could see that though He was human, He was also still God.

7. In fact, from eternity He was always willing to put self aside without feeling that this in any way detracted from His self-worth or from His equality with God. Eagerly and willingly He came to this earth and took on man's nature and became a child in one of the poorest families in Israel.

8. As an ordinary human being, He obeyed God in everything. He even obeyed God when He asked Him to go on to Calvary. There He allowed Himself to be publicly humiliated as they stripped Him naked and hung Him on the cross.

9. This is why God can exalt Him, because He's so selfless and humble. God has rightfully exalted Him and given Him a name above every other name in heaven and on earth.

10. The time is coming when at the name of Jesus all beings in heaven and on earth, whether they are dead or alive, will bow and acknowledge who He really is.

11. Each in his own way will proclaim that Jesus Christ rightly deserves to be Lord because He lived such a selfless life.

12. So my dear friends, just as you've always obeyed God, not only when I was with you, but even more earnestly when I was away, continue to obey Him. Put in all the effort you can as you work the salvation you received from Christ into your daily life, and do it with humbleness of mind,

13. all the while recognizing that it is God who is at work in you. He is the One who is helping you to be willing and enabling you to do what you're doing, which pleases Him very much.

14. So be thankful and whatever you do, do without arguing or complaining about it.

15. In fact, everything you do should be blameless and all your actions should be innocent and morally above reproach. You're God's children even though you live in a corrupt world. You're different and your lives are like lights in the darkness so others can see, like stars lighting up the night sky.

16. You're the precious ones who are holding out the Word of Life. And I'll be doubly proud of you when Christ comes and introduces each of you to the whole universe. Then I'll rejoice because my work and effort for you was not in vain.

17. Now as I go before Nero, maybe God wants me to spill my blood like Christ did His. Maybe He wants me to give my life as a sacrificial offering to be added to your life of faith. If that's so, I'll gladly die for Him just as joyously as you're living for Him.

18. I don't want you to weep, but be glad with me as I offer my life to God as a willing sacrifice.

19. And, I hope and trust that if it's the Lord's will, I'll soon be able to send Timothy to you. He'll tell you all about me and then bring back news about you.

20. He's the only one, as far as I know, who feels the same way about you as I do

and who loves you more than he loves himself.

21. It seems as though so many are concerned about their own affairs instead of the things of Christ.

22. But Timothy's different. He's proven himself. He and I are like father and son. We've worked and sacrificed together for the good of the gospel and so I know the kind of person he is.

23. I'll send him to you as soon as I know how life will turn out for me here.

24. I'm still hoping to be released and if it's the Lord's will for me to come to see you, I'll do so as quickly as I can.

25. However, I've already sent Epaphroditus to you. He's been a companion, a friend, and has worked with me fighting for the rights of the gospel. You were the ones who asked him to come here and be a help to me, which he has certainly done.

26. He's been away from home for quite awhile now, so he's anxious to get back to see all of you again, especially since he heard that you were so worried about him.

27. And what you heard about him was true. He was quite sick and almost died. But God was merciful and compassionate toward him and healed him, and in that sense He showed His compassion toward all of us. For this I am truly grateful because, if he had died, it would have added still more grief to my life.

28. But he's alive and well, and now I'm all the more eager for him to leave and go back home so you can see and hear what God has done for him. Then I won't have to feel badly because of your concern about him.

29. When he arrives, receive him joyfully. Give him the honor he deserves, just as you've honored all the other battle-scarred gospel workers who have stopped by to visit you.

30. After all, he did risk his life for Christ and nearly died in the process. Yet he never once flinched or hesitated to support me, but did exactly what you wanted him to do for me.

CHAPTER 3

1. In conclusion, my brothers, let me encourage you to always rejoice in the

Lord. I don't mind repeating what I've said because, if you hear it again, it'll safeguard you even more than it did before.

2. So, for your sake, let me say it again. Watch out for those who are constantly needling you about getting circumcised and telling you that you have to become Jews before you can be Christians. They're as irritating as dogs who never stop barking. They're trying to convince you that you have to be circumcised to be saved. That just isn't so.

3. The circumcision that really counts is the circumcision of the heart, of which the outward circumcision is a symbol. This means that we worship God in spirit and in truth and rejoice in what Jesus Christ has done for us. Our confidence is certainly not in what the flesh can do to earn salvation.

4. Now if anyone could put confidence in the flesh to earn salvation, I certainly could. And if someone thinks he has a better track record than I do, I'll be happy to challenge him on it.

5. I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I was born an Israelite and belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. I grew up and was trained in the strictest Pharisaic tradition. If there ever was a real Hebrew, I was it. And I kept the Jewish laws so well that I was considered a real Pharisee and was made a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish national council!

6. Sincere? Was I ever! In fact, I was so sincere that the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem entrusted me with the responsibility to rid the country of Christians. And as far as keeping all additional rules and regulations of the Jews is concerned, I was so thorough in what I did that I was recognized as being righteous and without fault.

7. But all those things I once thought extremely important for salvation, I now see as worthless because I have put my hope in Jesus Christ and not in what I can do.

8. In fact, I consider everything of that kind worthless in comparison to the priceless treasure of Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. And for the sake of knowing Him, I have eagerly and willingly suffered the loss of all things. In my estimation,

everything I had and did was nothing but rubbish in comparison to knowing Jesus Christ and to being spiritually bonded to Him.

9. I'm certainly not proud of the righteousness which I had achieved at the expense of my bondage to the meticulous keeping of every jot and tittle of the Jewish law. But now I have a righteousness which was given to me by Jesus Christ through faith in Him. This righteousness comes directly from God and is based on faith, not on works.

10. So my greatest desire since the day I met Christ is to know Him better, and each day to experience more of the power of His resurrection deep in my own soul. And now that I'm up for trial, I'm willing to die for Him because He was willing to come and die for me.

11. So with full assurance and hope in the resurrection, I know that I will be raised from the dead just as He was.

12. This assurance is not based on what I've achieved, or on a certain state of flawless perfection that I think I've reached, but on Christ. My great desire is to be more like Him, and as I strive to copy Him, my fellowship with Him deepens, and each time it does it's like getting a prize, even though He's the One who got the prize for me. In fact, it was He who has won me, not I Him.

13. I'm as honest with you as I can be. I don't consider myself as having achieved any special status by what I've done, or having secured salvation for myself by my own works. However, there is one thing I have done and will continue to do, and that is to forget what I've done yesterday and to do my best to reach the spiritual goals that lie ahead of me today.

14. Every day I fix my eyes on the mark of my high calling in Jesus Christ. Each day I concentrate on gaining a spiritual experience with Him, which is like a prize held out to me by God through what Jesus Christ has already done for me.

15. So let's all participate in this race. Those of you who are spiritually mature should have the same attitude toward life as I have. If some of you don't understand what I'm talking about, God will make it

clear to you.

16. In the meanwhile, at whatever growth stage we find ourselves, let's keep the same objective in view that we had in the beginning.

17. If you don't know what to do, my brothers, then pattern your life after mine or after those who are following me and who know what my life is like.

18. Unfortunately, there are many whose lives are contrary to the life of Christ. In that sense, they're His enemies, not His friends. I warned you of this many times before, and now with tears in my eyes, I'm warning you again because I love you and care about you.

19. If those who are doing this to you don't change, they'll only end up destroying themselves. All they can think about is their own bellies, and then brag to their friends about doing things they know they're not supposed to do. Their only concern is this life, not the life to come.

20. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly look forward to the coming of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

21. At that time, He will change our weak and sinful bodies to be like His sinless and glorious body. By His power He will subdue all things to Himself.

CHAPTER 4

1. I want you to know how dear you are to me, and how much I care about you and I miss you. You are my joy and crown. I'm really proud of you. I'm urging you, my dear brothers, to continue to stand for the Lord.

2. **Euodia** and **Syntyche**, I beg you both to try to agree and to get along as sisters in the Lord.

3. And I ask you, **Syzygus**, my trusty yokefellow, to help these women get together, because both of them worked hard when they were with me. They helped me to spread the gospel just as **Clement** and my other fellow workers did. There is no doubt in my mind that their names are written in God's Book of Life.

4. Always rejoice in the Lord. And again I say, rejoice!

5. Let your compassion and love for everyone be evident wherever you go.

Remember that the Lord is always near at hand and someday will come again.

6. Don't worry so much about everything. When you pray, ask God for what you need and don't be afraid to plead with Him, but always do so with a thankful heart.

7. When you do this, God's peace, which is beyond human comprehension, will steady your hearts and keep your minds on Jesus Christ.

8. Finally, my brothers, fill your minds with things that are good and right and true. Think about things that are honorable, noble, pure, and lovely. Focus on the good things in others. Recall everything God has done for you and then praise Him for it.

9. Put into practice what I've taught you and what you've learned from watching me, and the God of peace will ever be with you.

10. All my Christian life, I've rejoiced in my union with the Lord. Your love and care for me has added to my joy. I'm not trying to say that you didn't care for me before, but it's just that you never had the opportunity to really show it until now.

11. I'm not saying this to make you think I feel neglected, I'm not. You see, over the years I've learned to be content in whatever situation I find myself. And that's how it is now.

12. I know from experience what it's like to be in extreme need and feel humbled, and also what it is to have more than I could personally use and feel rich. I've learned the secret of being content with myself anywhere I am, whether I'm hungry or well fed, whether I have little or much.

13. I've learned that the secret of my strength to face all conditions at all times and still be content is found in Jesus Christ and in the power that He provides me with when I need it.

14. But I'm human and I still appreciate what you've done for me. And it was good for you to help me the way you did.

15. You Philippians know very well that after I left your area of Macedonia in the early days of my ministry, not one church stayed in touch with me to see how I was

doing. You were the only ones. You cared about me. And through our correspondence, you sincerely shared with me my joys and my sorrows.

16. More than once while I was working in Thessalonica, you sent me the help I needed.

17. I'm not saying this because I want you to give me more gifts, but I want your generosity to grow and develop, and I want to see more of this kind of spiritual prosperity credited to your account.

18. By the way, I received everything you sent me through Epaphroditus, and it is more than I need. I have enough. Thank you. Your generous gifts were like sweet perfume. They were like a fragrant offering, pleasing to God. And these are the

kinds of gifts that God appreciates, because they come from loving and caring hearts.

19. God is the kind of Person who will not forget this. In return He will supply all your needs from His abundant wealth, which through Jesus Christ now rightfully belongs to you.

20. Unto God, our heavenly Father, be glory and honor for ever and ever. Amen.

21. Greet everyone who belongs to Jesus Christ. The brothers who are here helping me send their greetings.

22. All God's people in Rome send their greetings, especially those who live and work in Caesar's palace.

23. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

COLOSSIANS

CHAPTER 1

1. **This** letter is from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and from Timothy, our brother who asked me to send you his greetings.

2. I'm sending this letter to the members at Colossae, who are our brothers, and faithful and loyal disciples of Christ. Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. We thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for all of you and we never stop praying for you.

4. We were especially thankful for you after we heard about your faith and trust in the Lord and how much you love and care for all those who are called and set aside by Him.

5. Your hope for the future is as secure as heaven itself and that's where your love and faith come from. You anchored your hope in heaven from the first day you heard the word of truth and received the good news of the gospel.

6. Since then, the gospel has been spread throughout the Roman world and is already bearing fruit in others, just as it is in you. Many are responding to the word of truth just as you did, and they're now tasting the graciousness of God even as you are.

7. And since you first responded to the good news of the gospel, you've been learning still more about it. Epaphras, our fellowworker, has been serving you as your pastor, and you can be thankful because he's most dependable.

8. He told us all about your love for each other and how the Holy Spirit has come into your lives.

9. For all these reasons, and especially since we received his report, we haven't stopped praying for you. We want you to know God even better than you now do. So we're praying that God will give you still more insight and ability to understand spiritual things than you already have.

10. Also, we're praying that you will continue to please the Lord by living honorably, that you will bear fruit by doing good deeds, and that you will continue to

grow in the knowledge of the Lord.

11. May God strengthen you and give you that power that can only come from Him, which will help you to have even greater endurance and patience than you already have.

12. Let us all be joyful in the Lord and give thanks to the Father, who has made us suitable subjects and citizens of His kingdom. For He is the One who has also promised us an inheritance and assured us a place in His kingdom.

13. He is the One who delivered us from the control of the kingdom of darkness and transformed us into members of the kingdom of light.

14. It was God's own Son who died to redeem us and forgave us of our sins.

15. **He** is the visible likeness of the invisible God, and as God's only conceived Son, He's set above all created beings in the universe.

16. In fact, through Him the Father created all things to begin with, whether they exist in heaven or on earth, visible or invisible. All order and power was instituted by Him, whether spiritual or secular, including the arrangement of having governments, rulers, and various levels of authority. All things were created by Him and are intended to serve Him.

17. He existed before anything was created, and by Him everything that exists continues to hold together.

18. He is also the head of the church and controls the church as a head controls the body. Although He existed from the beginning, He was the only human who died, and by doing so conquered death. Therefore, He is worthy to be given first place above all things in heaven and on earth.

19. And it pleased the Father to acknowledge Him as fully God in spite of His human nature.

20. He is the One who brought peace to the human race by shedding His blood, and by doing so, He again united heaven and earth.

21. He also removed the hostility that existed in you toward heaven because of

the way your minds worked. But now they work differently.

22. This change in you was made possible because He took on human nature and died in your place. He did this for the very purpose of presenting you holy and without blame to God the Father before the whole universe.

23. Yes, He has all this in mind for you, provided you continue trusting Him and as mature believers settle this whole thing once and for all in your own minds so that nothing will move you away from this hope. This is the hope contained in the gospel, which we preached to you, and to others throughout the Roman Empire. And this is the ministry into which I was called.

24. **Now** the reason I can rejoice in my suffering is because I'm thinking of you and your future, not of myself. It's been a real privilege for me to tell you in just a small way how much Christ loves you and cares about you. He loved you so much that He suffered and died for you so He could transform you and then give you the privilege to help Him complete His mission.

25. This is the same objective that I have in my ministry, and is exactly what God intended me to do. And all these things are given to serve you and to let you know that His promise is sure.

26. Yes, the good news of salvation has always been preached. All through the ages and from generation to generation, the good news has been the same and has never changed. But it was partially hidden until now, and you are some of the first ones to see it in its fullness, which makes you special.

27. So now God wants to use you so others can be attracted to Him by the glory of the spiritual riches they see in your lives. And all this is happening because Christ is in you. He is the hope of your glorious future.

28. This is the Christ that we preach. This is why we caution you not to lose your hold on Him. This is why we're so careful about what we teach, because we want after truth present you as mature men and women to Jesus Christ.

29. I work hard and use all my energies

for Him, but He is the One who works in me and motivates me to do what I'm doing.

CHAPTER 2

1. I want you to know how much I care about you and the many trials I've gone through for you, all because I love you. I've suffered for others, including those in Laodicea, even though many of them have never met me.

2. Why was I willing to do all this? I did it so your lives might be transformed, your hearts be filled with courage, and you might be drawn together by your love for Jesus Christ. Yes, I'm doing all this for you so you can experience the full assurance of salvation and the mysterious oneness that exists between the Father and the Son.

3. And Christ is the key to help you understand the hidden things about God, including God's great wisdom and knowledge.

4. I'm telling you this so you won't be swept off your feet with false arguments about our faith, no matter how reasonable or logical they might sound.

5. Remember, even though I'm not personally with you, I am there in spirit and I'm happy to see the resolute firmness with which you're standing together in your faith in Christ.

6. So then, just as gladly as you first accepted Christ as your Savior and Lord, so with the same gladness continue to walk with Him.

7. Sink your roots deep into Him, build your lives on Him, and commit yourselves more firmly to Him and to what you've been taught about Him. Do all this joyously and with gratitude and thanksgiving.

8. **Be** careful and don't let anyone deceive you by a philosophy of fine words but which ends up undermining the gospel. Such men are not really seeking after truth, even though they say so. Many of these philosophies have their source from the elemental powers of this world and not from Christ.

9. It is in Christ that the whole fullness of deity is embodied. He is the one Human in whom all the wisdom and knowledge

of God is found.

10. And it is in Him that you are complete, and it is from Him that you receive all the essential knowledge you need to be saved. He is the One who is supreme over every spiritual power and all human authority.

11. Through your union with Christ you were circumcised, not physically, but spiritually, by cutting away the power of sin in your life.

12. That's what your baptism was all about. You were buried in the water, and then you rose again. And because of your faith in Christ, the same power from God that raised Christ from the dead changed your heart.

13. I remember the time when you were spiritually dead and your lives were sinful and your hearts uncircumcised. But God gave you a new heart and a new life just as He gave Christ a new life, and furthermore, He's forgiven all your sins.

14. In fact, all the religious laws which made us live in fear, and in that sense were against us, are now made meaningless. Their right to condemn us was taken away when Christ died in our place.

15. It was at Calvary that Christ showed His supremacy over sin by stripping the powers of evil of their armor and taking them captive. He held them up to public gaze for what they were. And He did this openly so that all might see and acknowledge His victory.

16. Don't let anyone control your life by giving you a set of ceremonial rules about what to eat, what to drink, and what festivals or special Sabbaths to keep.

17. All these rules were given as a shadow of the reality to come and that reality is found in Jesus Christ.

18. Don't let anyone rob you of your experience with the Lord by condemning you for what you're doing. Don't let them put a guilt trip on you by their fake humility, their respect for spiritual things, including praying to angels, or their mystic experiences inflated by their carnal minds.

19. They've already let go of Him who is the Head of the church and the final authority on how we are saved. It is through Christ that the whole church is

held together and nourished for growing, just as a body is held together by muscles and ligaments and grows as God decides it should grow.

20. When you accepted Christ and died with Him, you were set free from the spirit of this world. Then why do you submit yourselves to do such things?

21. Why are you following rules and regulations that have absolutely no meaning, such as: "Don't handle this!" "Don't taste that!" "Don't touch that thing over there!"?

22. All such ceremonial rules are worthless and will perish with those who depend on them.

23. Such rules might look as though they're helpful because they make you feel good about doing something for your salvation. You might even feel more pious and think you're closer to God because you discipline your body, you respect spiritual things, you pray to angels, and practice being humble. But doing these things has no value for salvation except to indulge the pride of the flesh.

CHAPTER 3

1. If you're truly resurrected to a new life with Christ, then set your hearts on things in heaven, where Christ is seated on the right hand of God.

2. Make these things the object of your efforts and affection, not those useless ceremonial rules that some say you have to keep.

3. Your old self is dead, and through Christ your life is now part of God's very own heartbeat.

4. When Christ, who is our life, will come again, then your body will be changed and made glorious like His body was when He was resurrected.

5. In the meanwhile, you need to put to death whatever desires belong to your sinful human nature, such as sexual immorality, indecent behavior, lust, evil passions, and greed, which is nothing but self-idolatry.

6. God will one day show His disapproval of those who disobey Him and follow their own evil desires. He will withdraw His Spirit from the earth, and

those who have done these things will reap the consequences of their sinning.

7. The time was when you were controlled by these same desires. In fact, this is the kind of life you loved to live.

8. But now your lives are different. You've changed. You're no longer the angry, lustful, hateful, cursing, swearing, and filthy talking people you used to be.

9. Be careful that you don't slip back into your old ways of living, which can easily happen. Don't lie to each other, but be open and honest as you should be. Remember, you have put off the old nature and put on the new, so you don't do the things you once did.

10. You're a new people now and God is renewing you still more as the process of His redemption continues to work within you. His purpose is for you to become more like Him and to reflect even more of His loving personality. That's the reason He created you. And every day you can know Him better than you did the day before.

11. With this in view, there is no difference between Gentiles and Jews, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarians and savages, freemen and servants, because Christ can be in all of them just as He is in you.

12. Remember, God loves you and has set you apart as His own, so He expects you to be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient with all people, especially toward your fellow believers.

13. Be tolerant and forgiving of one another. If any of you are quarreling, forgive one another even as Christ has forgiven you.

14. Above everything else, love each other. This will bring everything else into harmony and bind you together in unity.

15. Let the peace that only Christ can give be in your hearts to be with you in all your decisions. This is what God had in mind for you when He called you to function as one body. We ought to be thankful for the kind of fellowship we have with one another, which so many others don't have.

16. May the message of Christ in all its richness fill your hearts as you encourage

one another through the use of the Scriptures and the singing of hymns and gospel melodies. Do everything graciously, joyously, and wholeheartedly, motivated by your love for the Lord.

17. Everything you do, do in the name of the Lord and for Him. This is the best way you can express your gratitude to God and show Him your appreciation for what He has done for you through the gift of His Son.

18. Wives, honor your husbands, because this is what the Lord would have you do.

19. Husbands, love your wives and be kind and gentle. Don't be harsh with them.

20. Children, listen to your parents and be ready to obey them, for this is pleasing to God.

21. Parents, don't irritate your children until they become angry because you'll discourage them from becoming Christians.

22. Servants, listen to your human masters and do what they tell you, not because you have to or because you want to make a good impression, but do so from your heart because you love God and you're working to please Him.

23. In fact, whatever you do, put your heart into it as if you were employed by the Lord Jesus Christ, not by a fellow human being.

24. Don't forget that the Lord will reward all His people by giving them their rightful wages when the proper time comes. So in reality, you are working for Him whether you realize it or not.

25. Those who are eager to please men are really working for them and not for God. They, too, will get their wages, because God does not favor one person above another, but judges everyone according to the same standard.

CHAPTER 4

1. Those of you who own servants, treat them kindly and well because you, too, have a Master, the One in heaven.

2. Keep your mind uplifted in prayer and be awake to your responsibilities, always being grateful for what you have.

3. Pray for us that God will open doors

so we can tell people about the good news and the unique fellowship we have with Him through Jesus Christ. It was for doing this that I was arrested and imprisoned.

4. Pray, too, that I may continue to share the message of Christ with people as I should, and to make it clear to them so they can understand it.

5. And be careful how you act toward non-Christians as you take hold of every opportunity to share your faith with them.

6. Always be pleasant and courteous, speak kindly to people, and know what you believe so you can give the right answers when they ask you questions.

7. When Tychicus comes, who is our brother and fellow worker in the Lord and whom we all love, he will share with you all the news about me and my situation.

8. In fact, the reason I'm sending him to you is to see how you're doing, to cheer you up, and to encourage you by telling you the experiences we have had.

9. Onesimus, that dear and faithful brother, who is one of your own members, will also be coming. Together they'll tell you everything that's happened here.

10. Aristarchus, who is in prison with me, sends his greetings. So does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. I've already written to you about welcoming Mark when he comes.

11. Also, Joshua sends his greetings. (He is the one who some people call Justus.)

All of these men have been circumcised and are Jews who have accepted Christ. They are the only men of Jewish birth who are presently working along with me to take the good news of the kingdom of God to the Gentiles. They have been a real comfort to me.

12. Epaphras, who is also one of your members and a real worker for Christ, sends his greetings, too. In every prayer he prays for you, asking God to help you to stand firm as mature believers, totally committed to doing the will of God.

13. I can personally testify that he has worked just as hard for the believers in Laodicea and Hierapolis as he has for you.

14. Luke, our dear doctor and friend, as well as Demas, send their greetings.

15. Also, pass our greetings on to the brothers from Laodicea, and to Nympha and the believers who meet in her house.

16. After you've read my letter, pass it on to the church in Laodicea so the members there can read it. Then be sure that you read the letter I sent to them which I told them to pass on to you.

17. Tell Archippus to take his call to the ministry seriously and to do the work the Lord wants him to do.

18. Now let me write this postscript myself. Greetings from me, Paul. Do not forget that I'm sitting here in chains. May God's grace be with you. Amen.

I THESSALONIANS

CHAPTER 1

1. **Greetings** from Paul, Silas, and Timothy to the members of the church in Thessalonica, who belong to God the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ. May the grace of God and the peace of heaven be forever yours.

2. We thank God for all of you and keep mentioning you to Him in our prayers.

3. With God as our witness, we remember very well how quickly you put your faith into practice, how your love for Christ motivated you to work hard, and how your hope in the Lord gave you the strength to stand firm.

4. Beloved brothers, we know that God loves you. That's why he sent Jesus Christ to die for you. So now you belong to Him.

5. When we brought the gospel to you, we came with more than just human words, but with the power of the Holy Spirit, and this power brought with it the conviction of the gospel's own truthfulness. You remember how we lived when we were there with you. Whatever we did was to help you.

6. So first you followed us and then you became followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even in the face of great suffering and pain, you received the message with joy, a joy that can come only from the Holy Spirit.

7. As a result, you've become examples to all believers throughout Macedonia and Greece.

8. Not only did you spread the good news about the Lord throughout Macedonia and Greece, but the news of your steadfastness in God has also spread everywhere. What else can we say? We're speechless.

9. No matter where we go, people already know how readily you accepted the gospel when we first brought it to you. They know how quickly you turned from your idols to the true and living God.

10. They also know how eagerly you look forward to the return of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, the One whom

God raised from the dead, and the One who delivered us from our sins and from judgment.

CHAPTER 2

1. So my brothers, you can see from what has happened to you that our visit to your city was not in vain.

2. I'm sure you still remember how shamefully we were treated, and how we were imprisoned in Philippi just before we came to see you. Yet when we arrived in Thessalonica, we fearlessly preached the gospel to you with the kind of courage that only God could have given us, especially considering the threats on our lives that we had to face.

3. Our appeals to you were not motivated by selfishness, nor did we work some kind of magic or trickery to get your attention,

4. but we spoke to you as God commissioned us to speak when He first entrusted us with the gospel. We didn't preach the good news to please the people, but to please God, who not only sees what we're doing, but also reads our hearts and knows why we're doing it.

5. You know very well that, when we came to you, we didn't flatter anyone, nor did we use the gospel to cover up something. We weren't greedy travelers, trying to see what we could get out of you and then leave town. God is our witness that our motives were to help you and nothing more.

6. We didn't look for praise or financial support from anyone, including you. As apostles we could rightfully have demanded all kinds of support, but we didn't.

7. When we first came, we tried to be as gentle with you as we could, like a nurse with newborn infants, or like a maid giving special care to the children with whom she has been entrusted.

8. We worked this way because we loved you and cared about you. That's why when we came, we were not only ready to share the gospel with you, but even to risk our lives for you. That's how

dear you were to us and how much we thought of you.

9. I'm sure you remember our labor and toil as we worked day and night to support ourselves so we wouldn't be a financial burden to you, all the while sharing with you the good news about our God.

10. And you're living witnesses, and so is God, that our motives toward you were pure, our conduct fair, and our words honest as we shared with you the good news of salvation through Christ.

11. We treated each one of you as a loving father treats his children. We encouraged you when you needed encouragement and comforted you when you were hurt.

12. Our concern was that you live the kind of life that pleases God, who wants to share His kingdom and glory with you.

13. We will ever be thankful that, when we brought the gospel to you, you listened with all your heart and received it not as a message from man, but as a message from God, which it is. This was evidence to us that God had already been at work in you to help you believe.

14. But what has happened to you since then has also happened to the believers in Judea who have accepted Jesus Christ. You're receiving the same treatment from your countrymen as the believers in Judea are receiving from the Jews.

15. Such people killed the Lord Jesus Christ, and before that they killed their own prophets. Now they're after us, and they're persecuting you. How can they think that they're pleasing God when they mistreat others the way they do?

16. They even try to stop us from preaching the good news to those who never heard about God. This certainly shows the kind of people they are, and what they're doing is quickly filling up their cup of sin. In the end, they will reap the consequences of what they've done.

17. My dear brothers and sisters, when we were forced to leave you, it was painful, and we felt as if we had been separated from you by death, but we were never really separated from you because we had you in our hearts and in our affections.

How we miss you! And because we love you, we're doing all we can to work things out so we can come and see you again.

18. In fact, more than once we tried to come and see you. Over and over again I tried to make the trip myself, but each time Satan stirred things up to keep me from coming.

19. After all, what is life without our mutual hope and faith, and our anticipated final victory in Jesus Christ! And when the Lord does come, what do you think we'll rejoice over when we stand in His presence?

20. We'll rejoice over you! You are our glory and joy! To see you stand in the presence of the Lord when He comes is what our love for you is all about.

CHAPTER 3

1. Now you remember, my brothers, that when we were in Athens, we couldn't bear to be away from you very long.

2. So we sent Timothy, our brother and fellow worker, who is very sincere in preaching the good news about Jesus Christ, to come and see you. Our reason for sending him was to encourage you in your faith and to comfort you in your sufferings.

3. We don't want any one of you to turn away from Jesus Christ because of what you're now going through. You yourselves know that these persecutions are not happening without God knowing about it. This is one way the gospel can be brought to the attention of more people.

4. When we first came to you, we told you ahead of time that you would be persecuted. And as you well know, that's exactly what has happened.

5. The reason I sent Timothy to see you was that I couldn't wait any longer to hear what was happening. I had to know how you were doing, and how your faith was holding out. I was concerned that the devil may have stirred things up, and that if the pressure were more than you could bear, our work and sacrifice for you would have been in vain.

6. But now Timothy is back and has brought us good news about you and about your steadfast faith in the Lord and your

awesome love for Him. He told us that you still think well of us, and that you want to see us just as much as we want to see you.

7. My brothers, in all the difficulties and pressures we face here, we are encouraged and strengthened by your faith and courage in the Lord.

8. And we can live even more courageously now that we know you're standing firm. Such news is life itself to me.

9. Once again we thank God for you and for the joy you're giving us, which lifts our spirits and in turn makes our ministry much more joyful.

10. We pray to God day and night that He will see fit to overrule our present situation so we can come to strengthen you and build up your faith even more.

11. May our God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, see fit to make it possible for us to come see you soon.

12. In the meanwhile, may the Lord Jesus Christ make your love for one another and for others become as great as is His love for us, and our love for you.

13. The reason our love for you is so strong is that we want to help you grow to be more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. We want you to be mature sons and daughters of God, and when He comes back, we want you there, because He's planning to present you as innocent children to your heavenly Father.

CHAPTER 4

1. So we beg you, my brothers, in the name of the Lord Jesus and for His sake, that you put into practice what you've learned from us, and live more and more for the glory of God. We urge you to concentrate on this as you never did before.

2. You know what we taught you and the guidelines we gave you. We didn't give these to you on our own authority, but on the authority of Jesus Christ.

3. The will of God is that your actions be different from the practices of unbelievers. This means for one thing that you don't engage in sexual immoralities as other people do.

4. Every one of you should know how

to control his own body, so that you can live pure and honorable lives.

5. You should not let yourself be stimulated into burning with passion by what you see and hear the Gentiles do, who don't know or care about God.

6. Furthermore, no one should defraud his fellow Christian or do him wrong in any way. As we told you before, the Lord will allow those who do this sort of thing to reap the consequences of their own actions.

7. God has not called us to live in sin, but He has called us to pattern our lives after purity and holiness.

8. Whoever rejects God's teaching is not just rejecting us, but also God. God spoke to us through His Holy Spirit and told us what to teach you.

9. And I don't need to write to you about brotherly love because the Holy Spirit Himself has been teaching you to love one another.

10. And you've already shown that this love and affection is in your hearts by the attitude you have toward believers throughout Macedonia. But I'm urging you on, so you'll love each other even more than you did before.

11. Concentrate on living quiet and orderly lives, minding your own business, and working to earn an honest living as we taught you.

12. This way you'll be seen by non-Christians as honest citizens, and you'll be able to take care of yourselves without depending on others.

13. **Brothers**, I want you to know the truth of what I told you when I was with you. Those of your loved ones who have died are sleeping in Christ. Don't grieve over them as people grieve over their dead, as if there were no hope.

14. I told you the truth about what we believe. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and, therefore, that those who died believing in Him will be raised back to life by God just as Jesus was.

15. We're telling you this by the authority of the Lord. What He taught was that we who are still alive when He comes will not be taken to heaven ahead of those who have died and are sleeping.

16. When the Lord Himself descends from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the One in charge of the angels, and with the sound of the trumpet of God, then will the dead in Christ be resurrected. This will happen first.

17. Then those believers who are still living when He comes will be changed, and together with those who have been resurrected, they will be caught up in the sky to meet the Lord in the air, and from then on they will be with the Lord.

18. So comfort and encourage each other with these words.

CHAPTER 5

1. Now, brothers, there is no need for me to write to you about the times and the seasons that will indicate when the Lord will come, and when those things will happen.

2. You know yourselves that the Lord will come as a thief in the night.

3. When everyone will say, "We've finally achieved peace and the world is safe," then sudden destruction will hit this world as it never has before. The end will come as suddenly and unannounced as labor pains come on a pregnant woman. And there will be no escape.

4. But my brothers, you're not in the dark about this, so that day shouldn't take you by surprise.

5. All of you have been given light on the subject. This makes you the people of the day and not the people of the night. You can see ahead and know what's coming, but those who walk in the dark can't see.

6. Therefore, let's not sleep, as others do, but let's keep awake and be sober.

7. Those who sleep, sleep at night. And those who get drunk, get drunk at night.

8. But we are people of the day and not the night. So be sober-minded and stay awake! Put on the breastplate of faith and love and wear the hope of salvation as your protective helmet.

9. God did not choose us for destruction, but for salvation, which we have through Jesus Christ!

10. That's why the Lord Jesus died for us. So, whether we're alive or dead when He comes, we belong to Him, and He will take us to be with Him forever.

11. Continue to comfort and encourage one another in the faith, just as you have been doing.

12. **Brothers**, we beg you to show proper respect for those who are working among you, trying to guide you and help you to live the Christian life. The Lord gave them to you as your shepherds.

13. For the sake of the work, if for no other reason, treat them respectfully and be at peace among yourselves.

14. Fellow workers, we urge you to warn those who are misbehaving, to encourage those who are ready to give up, to help those who are weak, and to be patient with all our people.

15. See that no one tries to pay back another member for what he has done, or to get even with someone because of what he did to them. Two wrongs don't make a right. Instead, our people should practice being good to one another, and to others.

16. Always be joyful.

17. Keep a prayerful attitude.

18. In every situation be thankful to God for what He has done for you. This is what's expected from people who live in union with Christ.

19. Never choke off the Holy Spirit's promptings.

20. Never look down your nose at the prophetic gift in your midst or criticize the inspired messages that the Lord sends you.

21. Test everything you read and hear and then hold on to what's true and never let go.

22. Avoid every form of evil, even if it looks innocent.

23. May the God of peace be with you and help you to live for Him. I pray that your whole being, your spirit, soul, and body, will be kept harmless and innocent by Him until you meet the Lord Jesus Christ when He comes to take you home.

24. He is the One who is calling you, and He is faithful in all that He does. He will accomplish what He sets out to do.

25. My brothers, do not forget to pray

for us. We, too, need your prayers.

26. Greet all the believers with a brotherly hug.

27. In the name of the Lord Jesus, I urge

you to read this letter openly to all the members.

28. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

II THESSALONIANS

CHAPTER 1

1. **Greetings** from Paul, Silas, and Timothy, to all the church members in Thessalonica, who belong to our God and Father through the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Grace and peace to you from God the Father, from the Lord Jesus, and from the Holy Spirit.

3. Brothers, we are thankful to God for all of you, and it's right for us to feel this way because your faith in God and your love for one another has grown by leaps and bounds.

4. That's why we're boasting about you when we visit other churches. We're telling believers everywhere about your continued endurance and confidence in the Lord, in spite of all the persecutions and sufferings you're going through.

5. This shows that God's grace is real and that His confidence in you has not been misplaced. It also shows that you're worthy members of God's kingdom, for which you're willing to suffer.

6. God always does what is just and right, so those who are persecuting you will not escape the consequences of what they're doing.

7. If you're troubled about why all this is happening, do as we do and keep your thoughts on the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He comes back, He will come from heaven with all His mighty angels,

8. and in flaming fire carry out judgment on those who reject the truth about God, and also on those who do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

9. They will not only suffer the pain of banishment from the presence of God, but also total destruction by the glory of His power.

10. All this will happen when Christ comes back. On that day, God will be vindicated by what He has done for His people, and the Lord Jesus Christ will be admired by all those who believe in Him. And you will be among them because you believed what we told you about Him.

11. This is the end to which we're praying, that you will be there on that day. We're always praying for you, asking God

to make you worthy of His calling and to fulfill all your desires for goodness. And we are asking Him to complete your work of faith through His mighty power,

12. so that the Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him. And this process has already begun in you through the grace of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 2

1. **Now** let me clarify for you even more what I said about the coming of the Lord and the gathering of believers.

2. Don't allow yourselves to be unsettled in your mind and to get excited by the idea that the Lord has secretly come, no matter who tells you so, whether they claim to be speaking by the Spirit or to have some oral or written communication from me. Don't believe them when they tell you I've changed my mind about when Christ will come, or that I'm now preaching that Christ has already come and will soon set up His kingdom and make Israel a world power over Rome. This is absolutely not true!

3. Don't be misled, because Christ will not come again until global rebellion against God's law takes place first, led by the man of sin.

4. He will exalt himself by opposing anyone worshiping God according to the Scriptures. He will sit in his own temple and speak for God as if he were God.

5. Don't you remember that I told you this when I was with you?

6. From what I shared with you, you know that there are reasons why all this is being held back, and that only when the proper time comes will the man of lawlessness be allowed to appear.

7. However, the secret force of lawlessness is already working, but as I said, at present there are things that are holding it back until the time comes for it to be fully unleashed, and then after a short time it will be swept away.

8. It is during this short time that the man of lawlessness will be seen and known for what he is, and finally the Lord will

overcome him with the breath of His mouth and destroy him by the brightness of His coming.

9. But before the man of lawlessness is destroyed, Satan will have an advent all his own and endorse this man's activities by mighty works and wonders.

10. And those who refuse to embrace and love the truth, which is their only defense, will fall into all kinds of sinful delusions brought about by the secret force of evil.

11. Because they did not accept the truth, they have no protection against the spirits of error, which will make them believe a lie.

12. Yet they will be judged because they did not embrace the truth and continued to take pleasure in unrighteousness.

13. But we are continually thanking God for you, my brothers, because you are beloved of the Lord and are among the firstfruits of the gospel in Macedonia. You were drawn by the Holy Spirit and you accepted the truth as soon as you heard it.

14. God has not only spoken to you through the preaching of the gospel, but He has called you to share in the honor and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

15. So what you need to do, my brothers, is to stand firm and hold on to the truths we taught you when we were with you, and also to the truths we shared with you in our letters.

16. Now may God the Father, who loved us so much that He gave His Son to die for us, and through Him gave us hope, continue to comfort you.

17. May He continue to help you to do good and give you courage to stand firm in what you were taught and in what you believe.

CHAPTER 3

1. **Finally**, my brothers, pray for us that we may spread the good news about Jesus Christ everywhere, and that many others will accept it as eagerly as it was accepted by you.

2. Also pray that as we preach, wicked men may not be able to stop us, because not everyone accepts the gospel, as you well know.

3. But the Lord is faithful and will continue to strengthen you and keep you from falling under the power of the evil one.

4. We have confidence in you that you will continue to do what we've asked you to do. And it is the Lord Jesus Christ who gives us confidence in you because we know that you're in Him.

5. Now may the Holy Spirit continue to lead your minds and hearts into greater understanding of God's love and give you the same enduring faith that Christ had. What a day that will be when He comes again!

6. My brothers, in the name of the Lord Jesus, do not allow yourselves to be influenced by believers who live in idleness and who show no inclination to live according to what we taught you.

7. You should know by now that it's best to follow our example and not theirs. Did you ever see us lounge around day after day as they do?

8. Did you see us live week after week off the hospitality of others? You remember how we worked day and night making tents to support ourselves and shared the gospel with you without asking you for a penny. We did this because we didn't want you to think that we preached for money, nor did we want to turn you against the gospel by imposing on your kindness and hospitality.

9. We also did this to be an example to others even though we knew we had a right to ask for your support.

10. We told you over and over that whoever refuses to work has no right to eat.

11. I say this again because I hear that some among you are not working, but are minding everybody's business except their own. They say they are working for the good of the church when they're not, and then they expect you to feed them.

12. By the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, I am asking these people to go to work, to earn a living, and to stop living off the church's funds.

13. My brothers, you must not become tired of well-doing.

14. And if anyone refuses to follow

what I just said in this letter, after it's been read in the church or after he's had a chance to read it himself, stop feeding him. Maybe he'll wake up and be ashamed of what he's doing.

15. However, don't go to extremes in this and treat him as an enemy, but treat him as a brother and help him to do what's right.

16. May the Lord give to every one of you the peace and assurance of heaven in everything you do.

17. I'm finishing this letter in my own handwriting, and I simply want to say: Greetings from Paul. That's how I end all my letters.

18. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

I TIMOTHY

CHAPTER 1

1. **This** letter is from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the command of God who saved us, and of Jesus Christ our hope,

2. to Timothy, who is my son in the faith. May the grace, mercy, and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

3. When I left Asia Minor and went to Greece, I had urged you to stay at Ephesus where you needed to stop some people from teaching false doctrines.

4. Such people need to be told to stop teaching doctrines based on mythologies and genealogies, which only end up raising a lot of questions that they themselves can't answer. Instead, they should be using their gifts to motivate the believers to live godly lives and not be ashamed of their faith.

5. The purpose of this charge which I am laying on you is to call for each believer to love others from a pure heart, to have a clear conscience before God, and to be sincere in their faith.

6. Some members have already turned aside from the gospel and have lost sight of these qualities by engaging in continual analysis and debate.

7. They want to be known as teachers of God's Word, but they don't understand the law and the gospel nor the implications of what they're talking about.

8. Yet we know that God's law is good if it is rightly understood and applied.

9. The law, as you know, is not written down for those who already know what is right and are doing it, but for those who are lawless and insubordinate so they can know what's right. It's given for criminals, lawbreakers, irresponsible members of society, and for those we generally call sinners. The law was intended for those who are unholy and profane, for those who dishonor and even kill their own fathers and mothers, for murderers,

10. for those who are immoral such as prostitutes and sexual perverts, for robbers, kidnapers, bandits, liars, false witnesses, and for anyone who lives contrary to the principles of the gospel.

11. Sound doctrine will harmonize the law and the gospel, which our glorious and blessed God entrusted me to teach.

12. I thank the Lord Jesus Christ, who counted me worthy of His trust, putting me into the ministry, and giving me the strength I need to serve Him.

13. All this He did for me in spite of my previous record of having cursed His name, persecuted His followers, and falsely testified against them to bring about their conviction simply because they believed Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah. These things I did ignorantly before I met Christ personally and tasted His mercy and compassion.

14. The Lord, through His abundant grace, gave me extra gifts and filled me with the kind of confidence and love which can only come from Him. And He did this that I could minister to the needs of others.

15. It is a fact that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, including me, and as far as I'm concerned, I'm the worst one of all.

16. But God is gracious and has dealt mercifully with me because that's the kind of God He is. First, He wanted me to meet Jesus Christ and taste of His salvation, and then, of all people, He wanted me to be an example to others, who would also accept the Lord Jesus Christ and receive eternal life.

17. To this Eternal King who has immortality within Himself, who is invisible to human eyes, who is the only true God, who treats us so kindly and wisely, to Him alone be honor and glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

18. Timothy, my son, the same charge of the churches that I received from the Lord Jesus Christ I'm now passing on to you, which is in harmony with the prophecies given to me. So I want you to take this charge seriously and to take the gospel weapons and fight well for our Lord Jesus Christ.

19. Hold on to what you believe with a clean conscience because some have already forgotten their charge and lost their way. They didn't listen to the Holy Spirit

speaking to them through their conscience and, as a result, have made shipwreck of their faith.

20. For instance, I think of Hymenaeus and Alexander, neither of whom can I help any more because they seem to be controlled by Satan. I hope and pray that they will wake up and stop cursing the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 2

1. I'm urging all our members to be more constant in prayer. First, they should bring their petitions to God with thanksgiving for what He has done for them. Then they should ask Him to bless all peoples everywhere so others, too, may accept the good news and be saved.

2. They should also pray for the emperor and all others in authority, so that these people will permit us to live quiet and peaceful lives with reverence for God and respect for the King.

3. Such conduct is good and acceptable to God and pleases our Savior.

4. The Lord's desire is for all mankind to receive His salvation and come to the knowledge of the truth.

5. Now there is only one God, as we all know, and there is only one Mediator between God and man. That is to say, there is only one human link with the true God that man has, and that link is the Man Jesus Christ.

6. He is the One who willingly came and gave His life for all mankind. This was the proof that God wanted everyone to be saved, and He gave us this proof at a time that He chose.

7. This is why I was sent as a preacher and an apostle to the Gentiles, to proclaim the good news about God. I'm telling you the truth. I've been specifically appointed as a teacher of the Gentiles.

8. And my great desire is for believers everywhere to lift up their hearts and minds to God in prayer, but without being full of anger and criticism.

9. Also, I want our members, especially the women, to dress modestly, sensibly, and in harmony with what is proper for Christian decency and dignity. They should avoid such things as fancy hairdos,

ornaments, strings of pearl around their necks, gaudy makeup, and expensive fashions.

10. They should clothe themselves with good deeds. This is fitting for women who profess to be followers of Christ.

11. Let a woman who is a new convert learn and receive instruction with a quiet and submissive spirit.

12. I do not allow any woman to interrupt the men who are leading out by claiming to have had a vision. Such a woman should remain quiet and not assume priestly authority over men as some of the women do in pagan temples.

13. Remember, Adam was created first and then Eve was made from a rib taken from his side. She is not to exercise authority over him.

14. And it wasn't Adam who was deceived by the tempter and then led Eve into sin, but it was the woman who was first deceived and led Adam into sin.

15. This means that women are not to be thought of as more spiritually reliable than men. They, too, must be redeemed from sin through that holy Child born of a human mother. And they will be saved as long as they remain steadfast in faith, love, and holy living with all modesty.

CHAPTER 3

1. **People** say that when a man wishes to be an elder he's wishing for something noble and good, and that's true.

2. An elder is someone who is honest and blameless in everything he does. If he's married, he should be loyal to his wife and not have another woman on the side. He should practice self-control in all things, conduct himself and his affairs properly and in an orderly manner, and be known as a man of sober and sound judgment. He should be willing to open his home to welcome and otherwise entertain other believers and be sufficiently skilled to teach the gospel so everyone can understand what he's talking about.

3. He should not be known as someone who has to have his wine, as a quarrelsome person always arguing about something, or as a lover of money who's never satisfied with what he has. He should be

a gentle, peaceful, and patient man.

4. He should be able to guide his own family, teaching his children to be obedient, respectful, and to love the Lord.

5. If a man can't give guidance to his own family and conduct himself as a good husband and father, how can he give guidance to the church and lead people to the Lord?

6. He shouldn't be a recent convert because this will most likely inflate his ego. And, if it does, he'll turn against the Lord just as surely as Lucifer did in heaven.

7. He should be a man who has a good reputation and be respected by those in the community. He should not be someone who is gullible and can easily fall into the devil's trap; nor should he be one who wouldn't hesitate to disgrace the church and discredit the work of God if he had to.

8. A deacon has similar standards to uphold. He should have a good character, be honest and truthful in all things, not be one who has to have his wine, or be controlled by greed and a passion to get rich.

9. He should show that he can hold to the gospel truth with a clear and sober conscience.

10. He should first be tested before he's elected and ordained. You don't ordain him and then see how he does. He should be honorable and blameless in his conduct before he's put into office.

11. Women chosen as deaconesses must also be of good character, not known in the community or the church as gossipers, but as sensible women, honest, and faithful in everything they do.

12. Any man who ministers in the church should be faithful to one wife, and be able to guide his family and manage his affairs well.

13. If such men carry out their duties well, they'll soon have a reputation for being honest, dependable men. Then they'll be able to stand up and boldly speak about their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and people will believe them.

14. As I'm writing this letter, I'm still hoping I can come to see you soon.

15. If my coming is delayed, this letter will help you to know how I feel about certain things and how they should be

done. In this way the members will know how to conduct themselves in God's house, for it is the church of the living God, the pillar and mainstay of the truth in a world of sin.

16. Now without dispute it is a mighty mystery which our religion unfolds to the world. It is something unheard of and unimaginable to the human mind, that is, Jesus of Nazareth being God in the flesh, confirmed as such by the Holy Spirit, worshiped by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on by people everywhere, and taken up to heaven where He now is.

CHAPTER 4

1. Now the Holy Spirit has told us that both now and especially in the last days, people will give up their faith and be disloyal to Christ. They will listen to spirits and end up following the teachings of demons.

2. Such teachings are already being spread everywhere, and often by believers who think they're Christians when they're not. The problem with such is not so much that they're being influenced by demons, but that their consciences have become insensitive to the things of the Holy Spirit, as insensitive as if they had been seared by a hot iron.

3. These people come up with all kinds of doctrines, such as forbidding believers to get married or to eat only certain foods. They even forbid people to eat food God Himself approved, which should be accepted and eaten with gratitude and thanksgiving, especially by those who are free from food rituals and believe and know the truth.

4. God gave us all kinds of good food to eat. So it shouldn't be classified as being spiritually good or bad. We should feel free to eat all the foods which God has said we can eat, and do so with thanksgiving and praise.

5. Then it will not only be approved by the word of God, but consecrated to Him by your prayers.

6. When you share with the people what I just said, also remind them of my other instructions. If you do this as you

should, you'll be the Lord's good servant. Now so far as your own soul is concerned, feed on the word of God and carry out its principles in harmony with the doctrines which you've embraced and which are now your own.

7. Stay away from pagan legends and silly myths. Instead, train yourself to focus all your energies on living for Christ.

8. Take time for physical exercise because this has great value in keeping you fit and keeping your mind alert. Most of all, concentrate on godliness, which has great value because it not only holds out the promise for a happier life here, but also for eternal life in God's kingdom.

9. You've heard me say this before, and it's still true.

10. So we gladly toil and struggle because we have set our faith and hope on the living God, who is the Preserver of all men, especially of those who believe.

11. These are the things I urge you to teach and preach.

12. Don't let anyone tell you that you're too young to teach them anything. Just keep on being a pattern for the believers by the content of your preaching, by your conversations with them, your attitude toward them, your care for them, your own pure life, and most of all by your confidence in God.

13. Until I come, continue your public reading of the Scriptures, and your scheduled time for preaching and teaching. Keep encouraging and instructing the believers as you've been doing.

14. Don't neglect the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit has given you, which the prophets who were present at your ordination confirmed to the body of elders as they laid their hands on you.

15. Continue to be faithful in your ministry, and use your gifts so that your spiritual growth can be seen by our members, which in turn will encourage them.

16. Most of all, keep an eye on yourself to make sure you're teaching what I've taught you. And as you do this, you'll not only save your own soul, but you'll also have a saving influence on the lives of others.

CHAPTER 5

1. As you pastor the people, don't rebuke an older man, but plead with him as if he were your own father. And relate to the younger men as your own brothers.

2. You should treat an older woman as if she were your own mother and a younger woman with the same decency and respect you would show to your own sister.

3. And the older women, who are widowed, treat them with special deference.

4. If a widow's children or grandchildren are able, they should carry out their religious duties toward their own and take care of her. This is both good and pleasing in God's sight.

5. Now the church should consider a woman as being widowed if she's truly destitute, and in spite of her circumstances keeps trusting God, all the while praying to Him for someone to come and help her. She's what I would call a real widow and needs all the help and encouragement the members can give her.

6. However, the younger widows, who give themselves over to pleasure, are as good as dead even though they're very much alive, because they no longer respond to your kindness or appreciate what you're doing for them. So leave them alone for now.

7. Ask the people to follow these instructions so that their actions will seem reasonable to everyone.

8. Now anyone who does not provide for his relatives, especially members of his immediate family, is denying the very principles the Christian faith is built on. He's worse than an unbeliever because he knows what is right but doesn't do it.

9. So don't add anyone to your widow list unless she's over sixty, and then only if she's been a faithful woman.

10. She should also be known for having helped others, having done her best to raise her children, had visitors over to her house, and helped people in trouble. And she should have done so rather consistently.

11. Don't put younger widows to your welfare and support them. They're the ones

who are more likely to want a husband and often forget all about Christ just to have a husband.

12. And if they do this, they then become guilty of breaking the promise they made to be loyal to Him in front of the whole church.

13. If the church continues to support them while they're just sitting around waiting to get married, they'll only be tempted to waste their time as busybodies, going from house to house gossiping, tattling about fellow church members, and talking about things they have no business talking about.

14. Now it's not wrong for younger widows to want to get married. We hope they can, and we pray that they'll find a good Christian husband, have children, and manage their households as they should so no one can speak evil of them.

15. Some of our younger widows have already left the church and returned to paganism. That's what makes the whole thing so painful.

16. If anyone has a young widow in his family, he should look after her and not let the church do it all. The church needs to take care of widows who are all alone and truly destitute.

17. Now as far as the elders are concerned, those who do a good job as leaders are worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and giving Bible studies.

18. As the Scriptures say, "Don't muzzle an ox if you're using him for threshing out grain," and, "A working man should be given his pay."

19. Don't listen to people who slander an elder unless you hear the same thing from two or three reliable witnesses.

20. But if there is sin, and it is openly done, it must be publicly rebuked, and the church should discipline those who do so. Hopefully, such loving discipline will keep others from doing the same thing.

21. Now I charge you before God, before the Lord Jesus Christ, and before all the holy angels, that you carry out your responsibilities without favoring one person above another and doing nothing that looks like partiality.

22. Don't ordain people and put them into office and positions of leadership too quickly. Have no part in any dishonest actions, avoid even being implicated in other people's sins, and most of all, keep yourself pure.

23. Take care of your digestive problems. Stop drinking just water, but buy some fresh grape juice if you have to.

24. Now some men's sins are plain to see and everyone can tell where they stand. Other men's sins are not so open; their sins will not be seen until later, at the time of judgment.

25. Much the same is true of good deeds. Some good deeds are plain to see, while other good deeds will be seen for what they are when the Lord comes. But no deeds, good or bad, will go unnoticed.

CHAPTER 6

1. Those who are servants of pagan masters should also treat them with respect so that they will not curse our God and misunderstand our teachings.

2. Those who are servants of Christian masters should not be jealous of what their masters have. If anything, they should serve them better because their masters are fellow believers and brothers in the faith. They should serve then because they love them and want to benefit them. These are the principles that you need to teach and preach.

3. Now if you have any one in any of your churches who does not agree with the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and teaches things contrary, the principles of discipleship as laid down in the gospel,

4. he's either ignorant, self-centered, or deluded. Such a person is usually taken up with disputes and debates, which give rise to all kinds of questions. He also loves to argue about the meaning of words, and only ends up creating jealousy and dissension.

5. This in turn leads to more arguments and keeps believers from applying the good news to their own lives. These kinds of people have minds devoid of truth. Others think that religion is only to help people be successful. Be careful not to

associate with such men more than you need to, or you'll soon take on the same kind of attitude that they have and become dissatisfied with the ministry.

6. The whole purpose and value of our religion is to reflect the Lord Jesus Christ, who in turn gives us a spiritual contentment and peace of mind that money can't buy, and in that sense, our religion makes us very rich.

7. We brought nothing into this world and it's certain that we'll take nothing out of it.

8. If we have food and clothing, what else do we really need? Let's be content and be thankful for what we have.

9. Those who have nothing but money in mind set themselves up for many additional temptations, and soon they find themselves having all kinds of foolish wishes and ambitions which in the end will only hurt them. If they're not careful, they'll be caught in an undertow of sin and be carried out toward eternal ruin and self-destruction.

10. Loving money is the root of all evil and the fruit of selfishness. Some are so anxious to get rich that they're willing to give up their faith and often bring on themselves no end of pain and regret.

11. But you are a man of God and should avoid all these things. Focus on righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness, kindness, compassion, and a gentle spirit.

12. Fight the good fight of faith. Hold on to the gift of eternal life that you publicly accepted from God through Christ in the presence of many witnesses.

13. I charge you in the sight of God, the great Life-giver, and in the sight of the Lord Jesus Christ, who in front of Pontius Pilate was not ashamed to confess His faith

in His heavenly Father,

14. that you keep your ministry free from reproach and be true to the gospel, so that at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ you will be declared to have been faithful.

15. His appearing will be brought about at the right time by God Himself, who is the blessed and sole Ruler of the universe, the only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

16. He alone is immortal and lives in light that no one can approach. So no human has ever looked into God's face and lived, nor can sinful man ever see His face. To Him be honor, glory, and power forever. Amen.

17. Therefore, ask those of our members who are rich to be careful not to become proud nor trust in their wealth. They should put their trust in God, and He will become the source of their enjoyment.

18. So ask them to focus their lives on doing good, becoming rich in virtue, helping those in need, and being kind to everyone.

19. By doing this they will be putting money in the bank of heaven, which is like a secured deposit never to be devalued. In addition, they'll now have a life that's meaningful, and in the end, they'll receive the gift of eternal life.

20. Timothy, my son, hold on to the teachings which God has entrusted to you. Don't get involved in foolish prattle and arguments which have nothing to do with true religion. Stay away from contradictory discussions which are supposed to be based on some sort of superior knowledge.

21. Some who profess this so-called knowledge have already missed the mark and have lost their faith. God's grace be with you. Amen.

II TIMOTHY

CHAPTER 1

1. **This** letter is from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, sent to proclaim the promise of a new life in union with Christ,

2. to Timothy, my dear son in the faith. May grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. I thank God for helping me to serve Him with a clear conscience as many of my ancestors did. Every time I think of you, whether day or night, I pray for you and lift you up to God.

4. I still recall your tears when they arrested me. I very much want to see you one last time so my old heart can be cheered by your presence.

5. When I think back and remember your great faith in God, the same kind of faith I've seen in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, I have no doubt that you'll continue to remain loyal to the Lord Jesus.

6. Don't forget to rekindle the flame of that divine gift which God has given you through the Holy Spirit when I laid my hands on you at your ordination.

7. God did not give us the Holy Spirit to continue to be fearful, but to be afraid of no one, to love everyone, to practice self-control, and to always use sound judgment.

8. So don't be ashamed to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and don't be afraid to speak up for Him. Never be ashamed that I've been arrested and that I'm being thought of as a religious fanatic and a criminal, but be ready to share in Christ's sufferings along with me. God will give you the strength and fortitude that you'll need.

9. After all, God sent His Son to save us and called us to live a holy life while we're still in this world of sin. He did this, not in response to what we've done, but in harmony with His own purpose and grace; and He decided to give us this grace by means of Jesus Christ before we even existed.

10. What God had in mind for us all along has been made unmistakably clear

by Christ's resurrection and His triumph over sin and death. This same triumph, together with immortality, He makes available to all who want it, which is certainly good news.

11. Now when God first called me to be an apostle, He told me to go and proclaim this good news among the Gentiles.

12. This is the reason I have to endure so much suffering. And now that I'm old, I'm treated as a criminal. But I'm full of confidence and I'm not ashamed of who I am and of what I've taught. My faith in God is good and I know that He is able to keep that which I've entrusted to Him until that day when I will see Him face to face.

13. Hold on to what I've taught you and to the example in ministry I've given you, one full of confidence in God and love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

14. Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives within you.

15. **Now**, as you already know, everyone who came to Rome with me from Asia Minor has defected, including Phygelus and Hermogenes, who were once so faithful.

16. But the Lord bless the family of Onesiphorus, because he stayed by me and wasn't ashamed of my chains. His visits cheer my heart each time he comes to see me.

17. When he first came to Rome, he kept looking for me and never gave up until he found me,

18. and you know how much he did for me in Ephesus. Surely the Lord will be merciful to him on that day when Christ will come to take us home.

CHAPTER 2

1. **My** son, be strong in the enabling grace of God which we have through Jesus Christ.

2. Now the things I've taught you, which you've heard me proclaim publicly in the presence of many witnesses, you are to entrust to reliable men who in turn can teach them to others.

3. Endure hardship like a good sol-

dier of Jesus Christ.

4. A good soldier is totally loyal to the commander he serves. He doesn't get involved in the affairs of civilian life, but his one aim is to please the commander who has chosen him.

5. An athlete does not qualify for the games, much less is he declared the winner, unless he competes according to the rules.

6. A farmer who has worked hard preparing the soil and planting the seed is the first to benefit from the harvest.

7. Think about these analogies, and the Lord will help you to see the principles involved and how to apply them to your ministry.

8. Don't forget that Jesus also was human. He was a descendant of David, but He was raised from the dead and is now alive. I've preached this fact and will continue to preach it because it's the heart of the gospel and helps us to understand what God has in mind for us.

9. Yet this is precisely why I've had to suffer so much throughout my ministry. And now I'm even chained and lowered into a dungeon like a dangerous criminal. But God's word can never be chained.

10. I know this, consequently I'm willing to endure anything for the sake of God's chosen people that they, too, may be saved through Christ as we are. Also, I hope that through my suffering I can encourage the Gentiles, who have already accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, to fully accept the fact that they are also God's chosen people.

11. If we allow our selfish lives to be crucified as He allowed Himself to be crucified, then as He was raised from the dead, we, too, will be raised from the dead.

12. If we suffer and sacrifice for Him, even as He did for us, then we'll share in His glory as He said we would. On the other hand, if we deny knowing Him, He'll have no choice but to deny knowing us.

13. If we turn against Him, He still loves us because that's the kind of Person He is. His attitude toward us is not dependent on our attitude toward Him. He will always love us because that's His nature. He can never be untrue to Himself.

14. Remind our believers of this, and

tell them to stop arguing over meanings and words, which only upset those who are listening.

15. Do your best to present yourself to God as a man worthy of His approval, a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed, rightly handling the message of truth.

16. So stay away from senseless and meaningless discussions which never help anyone, but only make people more irritable and un-Christian.

17. Such discussions are like a cancer that eats away at people's spiritual lives. Hymenaeus and Philetus are the kind who love to get people all worked up and involved in just such senseless discussions.

18. Where are they now? They've left the truth and are now teaching that the resurrection Jesus promised is already past, which has upset people's faith and taken away their hope.

19. But the solid foundation that God has laid can't be changed, and His promise is sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who belong to Him," and, "Let all who lay claim to His name renounce their ungodliness."

20. Now, in large expensive houses you'll find all kinds of dishes and serving ware. Some are made of gold and silver and others of wood and clay. The more expensive ones are honored by being used for special occasions, while others are used for every day.

21. So whoever keeps himself pure by staying away from evil will be an honorable vessel useful to the Master, ready to do any good work.

22. So avoid anything that will stir up your youthful passions and pull you into the world. Instead, use your energies to strive for righteousness, love, and peace, along with those who with pure hearts are calling on the Lord for help.

23. Again let me remind you not to get involved in answering foolish and ignorant questions which people ask, because there are always those who love to lead others into arguments over what they think is important.

24. A servant of God must not argue, but give his energies to being a good pastor and teacher, kind, patient, and gentle

with everyone.

25. Also, he must teach those with opposing viewpoints in such a way that God can use him as an instrument to lead them to change their minds and to discover the truth for themselves.

26. That way they may come to their senses, and escape from Satan's trap, by which he caught them and then used them to do his will.

CHAPTER 3

1. **Also**, I want you to realize that as bad as times are now, this is nothing compared to what will be in the last days; then times will be even worse.

2. People will be in love with themselves, and as a result, they will be selfish, money-grabbers, jealous, boastful, conceited, insulting, disobedient and disrespectful toward their own parents, ungrateful, and falsely religious.

3. They will have lost nearly all natural affection. They'll be terribly unkind to each other, break contracts and agreements without batting an eye, slander their own friends, without self-control, fierce-tempered, and will hate anyone who tries to be good.

4. They will be totally untrustworthy, self-conceited, having a high opinion of themselves and their own worth, and being in love with pleasure more than being in love with God.

5. Outwardly, it'll look like they're religious and church-going folk, but there's no real inward change at all. And at the time of the end, believers will have to be even more careful not to be influenced by such people.

6. Then there are the kinds of people who go visiting in people's home to gain control over those who are burdened with guilt and are swayed by any kind of emotional appeal.

7. These kinds of people listen to anybody. They're always ready to learn, but never come to the point of acknowledging the truth or accepting forgiveness.

8. These self-appointed leaders who are visiting people's homes are like Jannes and Jambres, those priests in Egypt, who resisted Moses in front of Pharaoh. They

deceived the people by using magic to do some of the same things Moses did. These kinds of men have strange minds and still oppose the truth by going around undermining people's faith in the Lord, and they do so with such zeal as to be possessed.

9. But they will not make too much progress, because it will soon be seen the kind of people they really are; and their bewitching influence will end just as the power of the magicians in Egypt did.

10. But you've listened to my preaching and seen the kind of life I've lived; you've noticed my faith, my patience, and my love; and you've been fully aware of my purpose in serving the people.

11. You personally saw me being persecuted, and know all about my sufferings first in Antioch and then in Iconium and Lystra. I'm sure you remember how terrible these persecutions were, and how the Lord helped me through them all.

12. All who are in union with Jesus Christ and live out the gospel standards will find themselves being shunned, even rejected and persecuted. That's nothing new.

13. Evil people and religious imposters will increase more and more. Near the end, times will be even worse as religious leaders and members deceive other believers and lead them astray while being deceived themselves.

14. But as for you, hold on to the truth you were taught with the same fervor and faith you had when you first heard the good news. And remember those who taught you.

15. But even when you were small, you've been exposed to the proper influence of the Holy Scriptures. This was good in that they made you wise unto salvation and gave you insight into accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and placing your hope in Him and not in yourself.

16. And the Scriptures are given by God. Every book is divinely inspired and useful for teaching the truth and refuting error. These writings are given to point out our misbehavior and to instruct us in righteousness,

17. so that men and women who serve God may become mature, qualified, and

equipped to do every kind of good deed.

CHAPTER 4

1. **Therefore**, I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who at His appearing will sit as Judge over the living and the dead,

2. that you preach the word. Insist on your freedom to proclaim the message. Preach every chance you get, whether it's convenient for you or not. Don't hesitate to use persuasion, or to speak out if you have to, but most of all give people hope as you kindly and patiently share with them the truth.

3. The time will come when people will not listen to sound doctrine, but will follow their own inclinations and ask for teachers who will tell them what their ears are itching to hear.

4. They will turn a deaf ear to the truth and end up turning to fables and mysticism.

5. So you need to be on the alert, to discipline yourself to use your head in whatever situation you find yourself, and to be willing to suffer for the truth if you have to do. Do your work as an evangelist, keep on preaching the good news, and stay active in your ministry.

6. As for me, I'm ready to face execution and spill my blood as an offering of gratitude to God for what He has done for me. I firmly believe that this time Caesar will not hesitate to pronounce my sentence.

7. Looking back on my life, I can say that I have fought a good fight, I have stayed loyal to Christ, I have done the best I could possibly do for him, I have filled my ministry with good deeds, and I have kept the faith.

8. I now have the wreath of victory waiting for me which the Lord Himself, the One who judges everyone rightly and fairly, will give to me when He comes back. And He will give this wreath of victory not only to me, but to everyone who loves Him and is eager to see Him.

9. **Considering** my situation, do your best to come and visit me as soon as you can.

10. Demas, because he loves this pres-

ent world more than the next, has already left me and gone to live in Thessalonica. Crescens went to minister in Galatia and Titus went to look after the churches in Dalmatia.

11. Only Luke, the faithful doctor, is with me. When you come, bring Mark along. He's developed into a dependable worker, and he can be a help to me here.

12. I've already sent Tychicus to Ephesus so you don't need to stop there.

13. Oh, yes, when you come, bring my winter coat with you, the one I left in Troas at the house of Carpus when they arrested me. Also bring with you the books and especially the rolled parchments of the Scriptures which give me such comfort.

14. Do you remember Alexander the metal worker who did me so much harm? Forget what he did to me; don't let it bother you. The Lord will let him reap the consequences of what he's done.

15. But continue to be on guard against him because he's violently opposed to our message.

16. When I first appeared before Nero, no one stayed by to defend me, so I defended myself. But I'm not holding that against them, and I'm sure the Lord won't either.

17. However, the Lord was there to help me and I was able to give a good testimony to the emperor about the gospel. There is no doubt in my mind that the Lord used me in such a way so that no one present could say he never heard the gospel. To my surprise, as well as to everyone else's, Nero didn't give me the death sentence, but sent me back to my cell so he would have time to think about it. However, this time I'm not expecting to be released as I was a couple of years ago.

18. I know the Lord will keep me from making any last-minute mistakes in denying Him or denying the gospel. I know He'll be with me until I'm executed. And when He returns, I know He'll resurrect me and take me home. So all the credit belongs to Him for anything I've done. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen.

19. Say hello to Priscilla and Aquila as well as to Onesiphorus, to his family, and

to all those who work for him and make up his household.

20. You need to know that I left Erastus to care for the church at Corinth and told Trophimus to stay at Miletus and rest because he wasn't feeling well.

21. Do what you can to come and see me before winter sets in. Otherwise those winter storms will keep you from making

the trip, and you'll probably get here after I'm gone. Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia send their greetings, as do all the other believers.

22. Now, may the Lord Jesus Christ strengthen your spirit and give you courage. Greet everyone there. God's grace be with you. Amen.

TITUS

CHAPTER 1

1. **This** letter is from Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. I was not only called to take the gospel to the Gentiles, but also to strengthen the faith of God's chosen people and to lead them to the truth about Jesus Christ.

2. I need to show them that our Christian faith includes the hope of eternal life, and that this hope rests on nothing less than God's own promise of salvation, held in reserve for man before the beginning of time.

3. When the right time came, God kept His promise by sending Jesus Christ to save us. This is the message He has commissioned me to preach. Therefore, my ministry has been ordered by the very God who saves.

4. Dear Titus, my son in the faith, may grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ who saved us be with you.

5. The reason I left you in Crete was so you could do some things there that still needed to be done. You need to select and ordain elders for every congregation on the island, just as I ask you to do elsewhere.

6. Now remember, an elder must be one who has a blameless reputation, is known for being loyal and faithful to one wife, and his children should be recognized as being Christians and not be wild and rebellious.

7. He should not be arrogant or quick tempered, and certainly not one who drinks, gets into fights, or is known for being money hungry.

8. He should love people, be hospitable, be interested in doing good, and be upright, holy, and self-disciplined.

9. He should be the kind of a leader who's faithful to God's message as it has been taught and one who can be trusted to teach it faithfully to others. He should be able to encourage the believers in the faith and also show those who oppose it to be in error.

10. **We** now have a number of converts from Judaism who were not really con-

verted. These are the ones who are going around demanding circumcision, deceiving people with their theological nonsense, and causing endless trouble among our churches.

11. Somehow these men must be stopped from ruining whole families by teaching and preaching things that are not true. Their whole object is to get members to give them their tithes and offerings.

12. In fact, it was a Cretan poet, whom the people consider to be one of their prophets, who said of his own countrymen: "Cretans are nothing but lazy gluttons, liars, and evil beasts."

13. He's not far off from telling the truth about them. That's why you need to talk straight to our believers there so they'll hold on to their faith.

14. They should stop listening to these fine-spun theological arguments and Jewish myths that are being pushed on them by those who pervert and reject the truth.

15. People who are basically honest and good will continue to see and accept things in that light, and those who are basically bad and always ready to take advantage of others will see and accept things in that light. Their minds and hearts have become so conditioned that it's natural for them to think and act that way.

16. They claim to know God, but their actions deny it. I detest what they're doing and would love to see them change, but because of their disobedient and rebellious spirit, I'm afraid they're unfit to assume any responsibility or to do anything good.

CHAPTER 2

1. **What** you need to do is to show the people that our teachings are based on a sound interpretation of the Scriptures.

2. Teach the older men to be sober, sensible, self-disciplined, sure of what they believe, and loving and kind toward everyone.

3. Teach the older women to behave themselves as befits their religion. They should not spread rumors, gossip, or be slanderers and accusers as is the devil. They should not be known as flitting so-

cialites and lovers of wine, but as women who go around teaching and helping others.

4. They should be examples to the younger ones, helping them to grow up to be mature women who love their families and are loyal to their husbands and children.

5. They should teach the younger women to think things through, to exercise self-control, to be good mothers and housekeepers, and to show respect for their husbands so that the truth of the gospel will not be discredited.

6. Teach the young people as earnestly as you teach the adults, and for the same reasons encourage them to practice self-discipline.

7. This means that you'll have to be an example to our people so they can see the things you teach modeled in your own life. And in all your teaching be honest and sincere.

8. Carefully choose what you say, so people can't criticize your preaching, and our accusers may be put to shame by not having anything to point their fingers at.

9. Encourage the bond-servants to obey their masters and to do their best to please them. Tell them not to be arrogant or to talk back because this will only hurt them and bring persecution on all of us.

10. Also tell them not to steal from their owners, but instead they should demonstrate how loyal and dependable they are, so their actions can give credibility to what we teach and attract others to our loving God and Savior.

11. After all, the grace of God is for everyone, bond-servants and masters alike.

12. And it leads us to give up our own interests and desires and to do what is good for the gospel. We need to live self-disciplined, godly lives wherever we find ourselves.

13. Are we not looking forward to seeing the realization of our blessed hope in the glorious appearing of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ? Of course we are!

14. He is the One who gave Himself for us, to redeem us from sin, to purify us to belong to Him alone, and to change us into men and women who do what's right and

good.

15. Teach these things to our people and use your authority and position as pastor to encourage them and, if necessary, to rebuke them so they can be the kind of people they ought to be. Let no one look down on you and on what you're doing.

CHAPTER 3

1. **Remind** our people to be cooperative citizens, to obey their rulers and others in authority, to listen to their magistrates, and to be ready to do good in every way they can.

2. Tell them not to speak evil of anyone, no matter what he did or how bad he is. Tell them not to argue and get upset over every little thing that happens, but to have a kindly attitude and be friendly and gracious to everyone.

3. All of us at one time or another were disobedient and even found ourselves on the wrong side of things. At times we gave in to our passions and drives for pleasure. We can't say that we were never jealous, never showed malice, or never disliked or hated anyone, especially if others felt the same way toward us.

4. But after the kindness and love of God was revealed to us, and we saw that He was not against us but for us, and that His purpose was to save us, our lives changed.

5. God did this for us, not because any of us were so great and good, but because He loved us and was gracious and merciful toward us. That's the only reason why we could be born again and then be baptized as a witness to our new life in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

6. And the Holy Spirit continues to help us live this new life. God has held back nothing that's for our spiritual good, and He did all this for us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

7. Thus by God's gracious act in Christ we were put right with Him and are now citizens of a new kingdom, full of hope, and recipients of eternal life.

8. What I'm saying is true, and I want you to keep emphasizing these things so that our members will continue to live the

new life, to do good deeds, and to help those in need.

9. Avoid getting involved in arguments over genealogies or over insignificant points in Jewish theology. Such arguments are useless and encourage no one to live a better life.

10. If someone continues to agitate such questions, give him two warnings. Then, if he doesn't stop, you'll know the kind of person he is. So don't get involved with him.

11. Such a person is not in charge of his own thinking, and his actions show that he's wrong.

12. Soon I'll be sending Artemas or Tychicus to take your place. When they arrive, come to see me at Nicopolis, where

I plan to spend the winter.

13. In the meanwhile, do what you can to get Zenas, the lawyer, and Apollos started on their journey, and make sure before they leave that they have everything they need.

14. I want our people to spend as much time as they can doing good. They should not get into the habit of living useless lives, just sitting around and vegetating. They should provide for their own necessities and then do something for others, especially for those in need.

15. All who are with me here send their greetings. Pass them on to those who love us and to our believers everywhere. May God's grace be with all of you. Amen.

PHILEMON

CHAPTER 1

1. **Greetings** from Paul, now a prisoner because of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and from Timothy, our brother, to Philemon, a fellow laborer.

2. Do share this letter with Apphia, who is dearly loved; with Archippus, a fellow soldier of Christ; and with all the members who make up the church that's meeting in your house.

3. Grace and peace to all of you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. Every time I pray, I thank God for you, Philemon.

5. When I hear about how much you love the Lord Jesus, about the confidence you have in Him, and the care and concern you show for each of the members, my heart overflows with thanksgiving.

6. I fervently pray that God will enable you to share your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ even more effectively than you've done before, and that your knowledge of all the good that is ours in Jesus Christ may be enlarged.

7. I'm really happy and my heart is cheered and at peace because the members there have the warmth and love of your leadership.

8. Now let me be bold and in the name of Jesus Christ ask you to do something which may not be very easy or convenient for you to do, but which you ought to do.

9. Because of the love and trust that exists between us, I have no hesitation to come directly to the point. I'm not appealing to you to do this as a favor to the old man Paul or because I'm imprisoned for Jesus Christ.

10. I'm asking you to do something special for Onesimus, who is like a son to me and whom I gave spiritual birth to right here in prison.

11. In the past he was quite rebellious and of little value to you or to me.

12. But now he's changed, and I'm sending him back to you because he's yours. When he comes, please welcome him back exactly as you would welcome me.

13. I really would like to keep him here with me because he reminds me of you, and what you would do for me if you were here. If you were here, I know you would do everything you could to make me comfortable during this imprisonment, because that's the way you are.

14. I don't want you to feel obligated to do anything if you would rather not. Unless this is your own personal choice, don't do it. Whatever you decide, I want you to do it of your own free will and not just because of me. That way I'll know that it's genuine.

15. Now all this may have happened to you for a reason. So, even though he ran away, and you went through a lot by not having had him, you can now have him back for as long as you want him, or for as long as he lives.

16. However, the difference is that he's no longer your slave but your employee; more than that, he's now your own dearly beloved brother. That's how I treat him here, and I've known him only a short time. How much more you should be able to treat him as your own brother in the flesh and in the Lord, having known him for a long time.

17. If we're in partnership for the Lord as you've told me so many times, then welcome him as a partner just as you would welcome me.

18. If he owes you anything, if he's taken anything from you, or if he's wronged you in any way, charge it to my account.

19. I'm writing this letter to you myself so you'll have everything I said in my own handwriting. I promise to pay for any damages he might have caused you. However, I don't need to remind you of how much you owe me for the rich life you're now living in Jesus Christ.

20. My dear brother, do this favor for me and for the Lord's sake; in this way you will cheer my soul even more.

21. I have the utmost confidence in your willingness to do this, and that's why I'm writing to you. In fact, I know you so well that I know you'll do even more than I

asked.

22. By the way, try to have a room ready for me when I come, because I'm trusting that your prayers will help get me out of prison. I promise that I'll come to visit you as soon as I can.

23. Epaphras, who has also been im-

prisoned because of Jesus Christ, and is here with me, sends his greetings;

24. so do my fellow workers, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke the physician.

25. Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

HEBREWS

CHAPTER 1

1. **God**, who in times past and in various ways, spoke to our fathers through the prophets,

2. has in our day spoken to us through His Son, who is the rightful Heir of this world because it was through Him that God created all things.

3. Christ is the outshining of God's glory. He's the visible expression of God's thought. He's the perfect representation of God's own being. And even now He's holding all things in the universe together by the power of His word. He's the same One who died for us to save us from sinning and is now seated on the right hand of God, the Sovereign of the universe.

4. This makes Christ very much superior to angels. This is shown by the fact that the name and title God gave Him can't even be compared with the names and titles given to the angels.

5. Which angel did God ever call His own Son? When did God ever say to an angel, "You are my Son because I have begotten you"? Or, when did He say to any of the angels, "I am your Father and you are my son"?

6. But when Jesus was born into this world, God said, "Let all the angels bow down and worship Him!"

7. Angels are created beings and they serve God in whatever capacity is needed. As the Scriptures say, "His angels are as swift as the wind and as fearsome as fire."

8. In contrast, God spoke to His Son and said, "Thy throne, O God, will last forever and ever because love and justice are the foundation of your government.

9. You love what is right and hate what is wrong. Therefore, I, God the Father, have exalted you in human form above every other being and have done so with gladness and joy."

10. He also said, "You existed before the beginning of time. You carried out our plan and created the earth and shaped the sky above it with your own hands.

11. They will perish, but you will remain. The earth with its sky will wear out like a piece of clothing.

12. When the time comes, you will fold them up like a useless garment. They will be changed, but you will remain the same and your years will never end."

13. Now to which of the angels did God say anything like that? And to which of them did God at any time say, "Come, sit right here next to me until all your enemies acknowledge your lordship and give you the honor that's rightfully yours."

14. Are not the angels created to serve us and are they not sent to help those who are saved and are destined to inherit the earth? Of course they are, but Christ is Lord and He's as superior to them as the heavens are above the earth.

CHAPTER 2

1. **Therefore**, we ought to listen and pay attention to what we have heard so we don't start drifting away from what God said.

2. For if the word given to our ancestors through the mediation of angels was binding, and every violation was punished, and if the father of John the Baptist was struck dumb when he doubted what Gabriel told him,

3. then how can we expect to escape the consequences of disobeying the word of God spoken to us by His own Son? He was the One who came to bring us salvation and whose teachings were confirmed by those who saw Him and heard Him.

4. And God confirmed the report of those who saw Him and heard Him by giving them power to perform all kinds of miracles and by giving them other gifts as He saw fit.

5. God did not put the future of this world and its salvation from sin into the hands of angels.

6. As the Scriptures say, "What is man that you should think of him, care about him, and honor him or his sons?

7. Yet for a little while you made your Son lower than the angels, and then in His humanity you crowned Him with glory and honor and put Him in charge of everything."

8. When the Scriptures say that God

put Him in charge of everything, that included the angels; nothing of all creation was left out, even though we can't see everything being subject to Him as yet.

9. Yes, God's own Son came down and was born a man, made temporarily lower than the angels to do for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. He came and died and tasted death for every man, and because of that, He was crowned with honor and glory and put in charge of everything.

10. Therefore, it was also fitting that God, for whom and by whom everything exists, should decide to carry out His plan to save man by the suffering and death of His Son, through which the Son was made the perfect Savior and the One to be put in charge of our salvation.

11. Thus, He who is holy and those who are to be made holy belong to the same family. And since Christ is not ashamed to call us His brothers, that makes us sons of the same Father.

12. The Scriptures tell us that He promised God and said, "I will talk to my brothers about you and what you have done for them. I will praise your name in their meetings."

13. In another place we find Christ saying, "I will put my whole trust and confidence in God." And again the Scriptures quote Him as saying to God, "Here I am with your children, those whom you have given to me."

14. Now since God's children here on earth have flesh and blood, the Lord Jesus came and shared their flesh and blood so He could die as a human being, and in dying, break the hold of him who has the power of death, that is, the devil.

15. And by doing this, He freed us from the slavish fear of death and the uncertainty of salvation which the evil one always holds over our heads.

16. It is obvious that He is not concerned with the salvation of angels, but with the salvation of the descendants of Abraham.

17. That's why He had to be made like us, His brothers, that He might become a compassionate and understanding High Priest, to stand in the presence of God as our human representative, and also to

present Himself as the Lamb that was slain for the sins of the people.

18. And because He personally experienced the temptations and trials that we have to face, and overcame, He is able to help others overcome and give victory to those who are tempted.

CHAPTER 3

1. **Therefore**, my Christian brothers, sharers of the heavenly calling issued to you in the gospel, you now need to carefully consider Christ's role as the One who was sent by God to be our High Priest.

2. The Lord Jesus was faithful and loyal to God just as Moses was when he carried out his God-given responsibilities.

3. Yet, you should honor Christ more than Moses in the same way the architect and builder of a structure receives greater honor than the building itself.

4. Every building we see is built by human hands, but God is the architect and builder of everything spiritual.

5. Now Moses carried out his responsibilities faithfully and well, just as a servant should. Many of the things he did pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah and to the sacrifice He was to make for us.

6. Christ did come and die for us, but He carried out His responsibilities as a Son and not as a servant. He is the One who is in charge of His own household to which we all belong. Thus, as long as we hold on to our faith in God, keep our eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus, and with courage look forward to the time when our hopes will be fulfilled, we are part of that household.

7. That's why the Holy Spirit emphasizes the importance of doing in our day what we need to do. As David says in the Scriptures, "Today you need to listen to God's voice."

8. So don't be stubborn as your ancestors were when they rebelled against God in the wilderness and decided to test Him.

9. Today God is speaking again when He says to you, 'Your ancestors continued to question me and my love for them even after they had seen what I did for them over a span of forty years.'

10. That's why I was so disappointed

with them and said to Moses: These people never seem to learn. Their hearts are always going astray and they never do what I ask them to do.

11. So I took an oath and told myself that I could not give them the peace and rest of soul I had promised them, no matter how much I loved them."

12. So do be careful, my brothers, lest in your hearts you begin to doubt and become distrustful of what God has done for you through His Son, and end up turning against the Lord Jesus and leaving the faith.

13. What you need to do so as not to deceive yourselves or be deceived by others, is to encourage your fellow believers to stand fast in the faith. The call to our ancestors to trust God and not forget what He had done for them in their day, applies to us today.

14. The only way we can continue to share in what belongs to Christ is by holding on to our faith in God, in what He has done, and in what He will continue to do to finish His work. We need to have the same kind of confidence in what He's doing now that we had when we first became Christians.

15. Since this is our day of opportunity, let's take advantage of it. Never forget the warning given in the Scriptures, which says "If you hear God's voice, don't be stubborn as your ancestors were when they rebelled against God."

16. Who were the ones who rebelled against Him? Weren't they among the very ones who came out of Egypt with Moses, and with their own eyes had seen God's mighty acts taking place among them?

17. Again, who were the ones provoking God for forty long years? Weren't they among the very ones whom He brought out of Egypt and who had seen all He did for them to preserve their lives? They were the ones whom God let die in the desert until a new generation came along.

18. Furthermore, to whom was God speaking when He took an oath and said, "Neither will they enter into my spiritual rest because I will not give peace of mind to those who disobey"?

19. He was speaking to His own people. They were not permitted to enter the land of Canaan because of unbelief, and they had no peace in their soul because of disobedience.

CHAPTER 4

1. Therefore, let's be careful that we don't make the same mistake and end up not receiving the peace of soul and the entrance into the heavenly Canaan that God has in mind for us. And we can easily do this by being either stubborn or negligent.

2. Remember that the gospel was preached to them in the yearly drama of the Sanctuary service just as clearly as it's being preached to us today, but it did not help those who disobeyed, because they did not have the same faith in God as those who obeyed.

3. And God swore by an oath and said, "Those who disobey will never enter into my rest." God has done His part from the time He created this world. So if we have faith in God and obey Him, then we'll receive that inner rest which God promised and which He alone can give.

4. That's why in the Garden of Eden He gave man the seventh-day Sabbath, not only as a reminder of creation, but also as a symbol of loyalty and fellowship. According to the Scriptures, God Himself enjoyed a special time with man when on the seventh day He rested from all His works.

5. But as He swore in the passage above, "I will give them spiritual peace only if they believe me and obey me."

6. All through the centuries God has extended this same invitation to generation after generation. The offer is still good and there are some who will enter into that rest, but others, like our ancestors, will not, because they don't care to listen to what God has to say.

7. Now God made another strong appeal to His people in David's time when He spoke to them and said, "If you hear my voice speaking to you, don't harden your hearts."

8. Now if the literal land of Canaan had been God's final goal, and the rest He

had promised had been only physical, then why would God make another strong appeal in David's time? Entering Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, as important as it was, was not the ultimate plan that God had in mind for His people.

9. So there still remains the offer of that spiritual rest that God intends for each generation to receive, of which the Sabbath is a symbol.

10. Those who receive the spiritual rest that God has in mind for them will put an end to their legalistic works, just as God ended His works and rested on the seventh day.

11. Now something does remain for us to do in order to enter that rest, which is, to believe what God said, to accept by faith the salvation He has so graciously offered to us, and to obey Him out of love and gratitude for what He has done. So with this in mind, no one need fail like some of our ancestors did.

12. God's word is like a double-edged sword that cuts two ways. It cuts into a man's soul and spirit, into his bones and marrow; it lays open to us our spiritual condition and judges the thoughts and intentions of our hearts; and it let's us see our own motives and then helps us to change them.

13. Each created being is totally exposed to God's eye. Everything we do is open to His view.

14. Yet, in spite of God's perfect knowledge of us, He gave us a wonderful High Priest, who came to live with us and who has now gone through the heavens into the very presence of God, ministering there on our behalf. This High Priest is none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God. So let's hold on to our faith and to what we profess.

15. We don't have a High Priest who doesn't understand us or who's incapable of feeling our pain. He was tempted more powerfully than any of us will ever be tempted, and yet, He never sinned or lost His hold on God.

16. So let's approach our heavenly Father with confidence, asking Him to help us in our time of need, and He will and graciously give us all the help we need just

when we need it.

CHAPTER 5

1. **Now** every High Priest is chosen from among his fellow humans, and he's expected to represent his people in things relating to God, which include offering up prayers, sacrifices, and gifts on their behalf.

2. And since he needs God's help to live a godly life just as others do, he can better understand his fellow humans and deal more gently with those who are uninformed and go astray.

3. But even though he's gentle and compassionate toward others, the fact remains that he needs God's help to live a godly life just as we do. He has to pray and offer sacrifices not only for his people, but also for his own sins.

4. Therefore, it is understood that no one can appoint himself as a High Priest just because he feels he's worthy of the office. Instead, he becomes a High Priest only because God called him to that office in spite of his unworthiness, just as God called Aaron to his office.

5. Similarly, Christ did not appoint Himself to His high priestly office, but God called Him to that office when He said to Him, "You are my Son. This day, I as your Father have called you."

6. In another place God said to Him, "You will be a High Priest for me forever, and you will function after the order of Melchizedek."

7. Now all through His life, Christ offered up earnest prayers and petitions for strength. And in the garden of Gethsemane He prayed with strong cries and tears that God would not let Him die forever, and His prayers were heard because of His submission and obedience.

8. So even though He was God's own Son, His obedience and loyalty had to be tested through suffering and death,

9. and having passed the obedience test, He became the perfect sacrifice for our sins and the source of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him.

10. Therefore, God appointed Him to be a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, who typified an eternal priest-

hood, and not after the order of Aaron, who typified another priesthood. And all of this was by God's appointment, not His own.

11. I would like to tell you much more, but it's difficult to put all of this in writing, especially since you're already having a hard time understanding what I've told you.

12. By now you really ought to be teaching others about Christ's ministry, but it seems you need some more instruction on a number of topics, especially on the most basic principles of salvation that God taught us in the Scriptures. So, rather than giving you solid spiritual food, I need to give you some more spiritual milk.

13. Now anyone who needs spiritual milk is still growing and needs to learn how to skillfully handle the truth about righteousness, that is, he needs to know the gospel more fully before he can teach it to others.

14. Solid spiritual food is only for those who are spiritually mature, who have a firm relationship with Jesus Christ, and who by experience have learned the right and wrong way of looking at things.

CHAPTER 6

1. But let me not keep going over some of the more obvious truths of our faith, which we learned when we first became Christians, but let's go on to some more mature teachings of the Scriptures. We shouldn't have to keep laying the foundation and emphasizing again and again the need for repentance and turning away from useless works, the importance of faith and obedience,

2. the instruction about baptism, the laying on of hands, and the receiving of the Holy Spirit, or even about the certainty of the resurrection and the coming judgment.

3. By God's grace and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we'll do what we can to help you in this one short letter to look beyond these basic beliefs, especially considering the time I have to put into what I want to say in writing.

4. For instance, some of the more mature questions we need to ask are: Can

those who have left the faith, who were once happy in the Lord and had received their share of the Holy Spirit, be brought back?

5. Can those who have known from experience that God's word is good, and have felt the power of His coming kingdom in their lives be restored?

6. Can those fellow believers who have apostatized and abandoned their faith be led to repentance and be brought back to the Lord? It's impossible for them to be brought back to the faith if they continue to mock Christ and make the Christian faith look ridiculous, because in so doing, they crucify Christ all over again and lift Him up to public shame.

7. In nature, God sends the rain and the earth drinks it in and produces crops for those who cultivate the soil, and everyone shares in the blessing.

8. But if the same field isn't cultivated, it'll produce thorns and weeds which are worth nothing. The end result is that people will curse the field and finally clear it of weeds by setting it on fire. This is what will happen in the end.

9. Now even though we speak like this, my dear brothers, we feel good about you and see those crops coming from your life that go along with accepting Christ.

10. God won't forget how much you love Him, the work you've done for Him, and the honor you've brought to His name. He won't forget how you ministered to His people and how you continue to minister to them.

11. And we want you to continue to minister to them and to others, not just for a few years, but to the very end. We want this kind of ministry to become second nature so that your hope will be more sure to you, and you'll be able to give evidence to others that your hope is real.

12. We don't want you to be sluggish Christians and lose eternal life, but imitate those who believe and endure, and in that way you'll be ready to inherit everything that God has promised.

13. When God talked to Abraham and gave him His promise, He took an oath to confirm it. And since there is no one greater and stronger to swear by, He swore on the

basis of His own ability and power.

14. He said to Abraham, "I promise to bless you, to give you a son of your own, and through him to multiply your descendants."

15. So Abraham clung to that promise, and although he wavered at times, he eventually received what God had promised him.

16. You know as well as I do that when people take an oath, they always swear by someone greater and stronger than they are, and such an oath puts an end to all arguments, because it's taken as a confirmation of what they said.

17. Since God wanted to show us by things we understand His intention to keep His promise, He confirmed what He promised to do for Abraham and his descendants by an oath.

18. So God's promise rests on two unchanging facts which make His word totally reliable. One fact is that God never lies, and the other fact is that He confirmed what He said by an oath. So we can lay hold of the hope before us with absolute assurance and this is what gives us courage to carry on.

19. This hope is a secure anchor to which we can fasten the ship of our faith, because it's hooked to the Rock, and that Rock is Christ. So our hope is not in ourselves, it is in Christ. And this is the hope that takes us into the Sanctuary, behind the curtain,

20. where Christ now serves as our High Priest after the lasting priesthood of Melchizedek and not after the transitory priesthood of Aaron.

CHAPTER 7

1. You remember that in the days of Abraham, Melchizedek was a priest who served God. And he was the one who blessed Abraham, when Abraham returned from defeating the four local kings and rescuing his nephew Lot, whom they had taken prisoner.

2. And Abraham acknowledged Melchizedek's priesthood when he gave him his tithe, one tenth of all he had captured from these kings. Thus you can see how great a man Melchizedek was. His name

means "king of righteousness", and because he was king of the city of Salem, his name also means "king of peace."

3. From the Scriptures we know nothing about his father or mother, his beginning or end. So in this sense, he's a type of the Son of God, whose priesthood is timeless because He has always existed and will continue to exist.

4. Now stop to think for a moment how great this man Melchizedek must have been in the eyes of Abraham when our ancestor gave him one tenth of all the goods he had captured in battle.

5. We know that the sons of Levi accepted tithes because this was spelled out by the Lord in the law of Moses. Yet even though they accepted tithes from their own countrymen, they were all brothers, descendants of the same father, that is, of Abraham.

6. However, Melchizedek was not a descendant of Levi, and not related to Abraham, yet he received tithe from Abraham and blessed him, who is our father and to whom God gave His promise.

7. The conclusion is obvious and without contradiction, that those with lesser authority are blessed by those with greater authority.

8. In the one case, the tenth was collected by men whose priesthood ends when they die, while in the other case, by a man whose priesthood has no recorded beginning and end.

9. So the Levites acknowledged a greater priesthood than their own because they paid tithe to Melchizedek while they were still in the loins of Abraham.

10. Thus they've also accepted the priestly authority of Melchizedek, even as their father Abraham did.

11. Now we know the Levitical priesthood was instituted by God and that it was given for the benefit of the people; yet if it had been adequate to bring about salvation through rites and ceremonies, then why was it necessary for the Scriptures to mention that Abraham honored a different kind of priesthood, the one Melchizedek represented?

12. And if the Aaronic priesthood is superseded by the Melchizedekian priest-

hood, then the law of rites and ceremonies must be suspended because there has also been a change of priestly law.

13. Melchizedek did not belong to the tribe of Levi, as we mentioned, but belonged to a people who were not a tribe of priests, and who had never been appointed to minister in the Sanctuary.

14. Now the Lord Jesus didn't belong to the tribe of Levi either, but belonged to the tribe of Judah, and Moses never said that descendants from the tribe of Judah should be priests in the Sanctuary.

15. Evidently a priest can be from a tribe other than from the tribe of Levi. And what we have said becomes even clearer when we see another priest appear, whom Melchizedek typified.

16. This new priest would then be chosen, not because He's a descendant of Levi and therefore legally qualified, but because He has no known beginning and end.

17. God himself gave His approval of this new priesthood when He said to His Son, "You are to be a priest forever, according to the priestly order of Melchizedek."

18. Consequently, the ceremonial law with its rites and symbols and all the instructions given to the Levitical priests had to be set aside because of its uselessness and because it was no longer needed.

19. That is to say, the law of ceremonies had no power to create the salvation it talked about, except to point to it. But through Christ, a better hope is introduced by which we draw close to God. He was the One of whom all the ceremonial laws spoke. It is through Him that salvation has come, and it is through Him that we have been brought back to God.

20. Also you need to realize that Christ was made a priest by an oath, while other priests become such by inheritance.

21. God said, "I will swear and will never change my mind. You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

22. This makes Jesus a much better priest of God's original covenant because He's the only One who can guarantee salvation, thus fulfilling the promise God made to Abraham.

23. Furthermore, human beings die, so you have a constant change of priests.

24. But Christ lives forever, meaning that His priesthood does not have to be passed on to someone else. He has a permanent priesthood and will always be our High Priest.

25. Therefore, Christ is able to complete the plan of salvation and to help everyone to come to God who asks for help. Christ will never die, but will live on forever. And He will continue to carry on as priest as long as He's needed.

26. So we have a High Priest who is faultless, flawless, innocent, and holy. In this He's completely different from sinful human priests who minister in the Sanctuary on earth. Christ is qualified to minister for us in the Sanctuary above.

27. He doesn't have to sacrifice animals every day of the year as human priests must, first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people. Christ did all this at one time when He offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins and paid the debt of sin on our behalf.

28. The law of Moses appointed men who were imperfect to serve as High Priests, but the oath taken by God came after the law of Moses and made the Son of God a priest, who is perfect forever.

CHAPTER 8

1. Now the whole point of what I've said is this, we have a High Priest seated on the very right hand of God Almighty, the God of heaven and earth.

2. This means that Christ is serving as High Priest in the Sanctuary in heaven, which is the real Sanctuary set up by God and not by man.

3. We know that every High Priest who ministers in the earthly Sanctuary is appointed to present offerings and sacrifices to God on behalf of his people. So Christ, who is ministering in the heavenly Sanctuary, must also have something to offer.

4. If Christ were still here on earth, He wouldn't need to serve as a priest, because there are scores of priests who faithfully carry out their duties according to priestly law.

5. But the work they do here is only symbolic of what is being done for us in heaven. And this is what God had in mind when he told Moses to build Him a Sanctuary. He said to him, "Be sure to follow the pattern of the heavenly Sanctuary that I let you see when you were with me in the mountain."

6. So Christ's ministry in the heavenly Sanctuary is the reality of the work the priests were doing here, and without question, it's the superior ministry. The difference is like the certainty of a promise made by God, compared to the uncertainty of a promise made by man.

7. Now if the arrangement God made with His people at Sinai under the leadership of Moses had been all that was needed to save us, then why would God have made the present arrangement through Christ?

8. Because God found fault with how people did it. He did not want them to place their faith in rituals and symbols, but in Christ, and He made this clear through Jeremiah when He said, "The time will come, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

9. I will not continue to speak through symbols as I did to your ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. They perverted my covenant and made their obedience a means of earning salvation. So I turned away from blessing them.

10. This is the covenant I will carry out in Israel: I will write my laws in their minds and put my values into their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

11. Then no one will have to teach his neighbor or brother about the meaning of things, saying, 'Come and let me tell you about the Lord,' because they will all know about me from the least to the greatest.

12. I will be merciful toward them and remember their sins no more."

13. When God spoke this way about the covenant He made with Abraham, He tried to show us that the instructions as misapplied by His people at Sinai were worthless, and besides this, those ceremonies are now old and useless.

CHAPTER 9

1. We know that under the arrangement God made with our ancestors at Sinai, there were rules for worship and a man-made Sanctuary.

2. When the Levites put up the Sanctuary tent as instructed, they placed the seven-branched candlestick and the table with the twelve flat loaves of bread behind the first curtain, in the section called the Holy Place.

3. Behind the second curtain was the section called the Most Holy Place.

4. Now, the little altar of incense, even though it was located in the Holy Place, was considered part of the Most Holy Place. In the Most Holy Place was the gold covenant box, inside of which was the golden pot filled with the manna our ancestors ate when they came out of Egypt; Aaron's rod that had budded when there was a dispute over Moses' leadership; and the two slabs of rock on which the Ten Commandments were written.

5. Above the covenant box were two beautifully carved angels, one on each side, whose outstretched wings overshadowed the gold cover, called the mercy seat, where the presence of God would appear. Now I don't want to take time to explain the meaning of each piece of furniture and the function of all the Sanctuary services, with which you're so familiar.

6. After the Levites put up the Sanctuary tent and arranged the furniture like this, the services were carried out by the priests, who every day would go behind the first curtain into the Holy Place to carry out their duties.

7. However, only the High Priest was allowed to go behind the second curtain into the Most Holy Place, and then only once a year. He was never to enter without a dish of blood from the animal which he had just offered to God, first an animal for his own sins and then another animal for the sins of his people.

8. Now God through the Holy Spirit had given specific instructions that the High Priest was not to go into the Most Holy Place until the services in the Holy Place had ended. Similarly, when the time came for the services in the heavenly

Sanctuary to begin, the services in the earthly Sanctuary would end.

9. We know that everything in the ancient services was filled with meaning and served as a type of the Sanctuary services in heaven, under which we are today. The great difference between the two is that the offerings and animal sacrifices made then could never take away sins or cleanse the worshiper's conscience and heart.

10. This means that the entire Sanctuary service with its meat and drink offerings and its purification ceremonies was only temporary, pointing the worshiper forward to a time of change when the reality of it all would come and God's covenant promise would be fulfilled.

11. So Christ, the Anointed One, came as the embodiment of the reality to which all the Sanctuary rituals have pointed. And now He serves in the perfect Sanctuary above, which is more than just another form of the imperfect services here on earth.

12. Furthermore, when Christ went to heaven, He didn't have to take the blood of bulls or goats with Him. He had given His own blood as a sacrifice for our sins once, and that was enough for all times.

13. **However**, if the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of a burnt calf sprinkled on those who were considered to be ceremonially unclean, could take away their ritual impurity, and allow them to come into the Sanctuary again,

14. then how much more cleansing power does the blood of Christ have, who in the strength of the Holy Spirit offered up Himself as the perfect Lamb of God. And He did this to take away our sins and to free us from those rituals, which for many had become salvation by works.

15. Therefore, Christ is mediating the newly fulfilled covenant, which God originally made with Abraham, and is offering the promised inheritance to all who take hold of it. This means that those who took hold of God's promise back there inherited eternal life on the same basis as those of us who take hold of the promise today.

16. The arrangement is somewhat like a will which people make before they die. But before their will can take effect, the

person who made it must have died.

17. The will means absolutely nothing while that person is still alive. In fact, before the will can take effect, it must be proven that the person who made the will is truly dead.

18. For the same reason, the old ceremonial arrangement had no meaning without the death of an animal.

19. This also explains why Moses, when he first instructed the people how to worship, took the blood of bulls and goats, mixed it with water, and then, taking a twig with hyssop leaves, wrapped it in red wool, used it to sprinkle the blood on the written law and on out toward the people, saying,

20. "This blood symbolizes the blood that will be shed to fulfill the covenant that God has made with you."

21. Then he also sprinkled the Sanctuary tent and all the things to be used in worship.

22. In fact, according to God's instructions, almost everything was sprinkled with blood. This was to remind them that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

23. Now if the copies of heavenly things had to be symbolically sprinkled with the blood of a sacrificed animal, then it also holds true that the heavenly services also had to have a sacrifice, but only a much better sacrifice than that of an animal.

24. That's why Christ, who is the Better Sacrifice, did not have to minister in the man-made Sanctuary here on earth, which is only a copy of the Sanctuary in heaven, but could go directly to heaven and into the presence of God as our representative.

25. This does not mean that, for Christ to be our High Priest, He has to do exactly what the High Priest did down here, who had to offer a new sacrifice every year as he went before God in the Most Holy Place.

26. If this were true, then Christ would have to come to earth every year, be crucified again, and then rise again from the dead so He could go back to heaven and carry on His work. And He would have had to come and die every year since Adam first sinned. But He only needed to die once to give meaning to the sacrifices, and

He did this when it was time for Him to come. So He came once and for all to fulfill the ceremonial rituals, and also to put an end to the power of sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

27. Now just as men have to die only once and then later face the judgment,

28. so Christ had to die only once to take away our sins. He will not come back to pay for them a second time, or to give us a second probation, but He will come to put an end to sin and to save those who are waiting for Him.

CHAPTER 10

1. Without a doubt, the ceremonial rituals were pointing forward to something better. The Sanctuary here on earth was not made to duplicate everything in heaven, because even though sacrifices were offered every day, they had no power to change people's hearts and to cleanse them from sin.

2. If the animal sacrifices would have had power to change people's hearts and to cleanse them from sin, then why did the priests have to keep offering sacrifices for them? If people's hearts had really been changed by these sacrifices, then why did they feel they had to continue them to be made holy?

3. Yet, day after day, year after year, sacrifices were continually offered because they were offered as a reminder of the cleansing that only Christ could give.

4. The blood of bulls and goats can never cleanse us from our sins or change our hearts. Only the Lord can.

5. David, in the Psalms, told us what Christ said about this just before coming to this world. He said to His Father, "I know that sacrifices and offerings are not what you want. That's why you want me to have a human body, so I can obey you and do your will as a human being should.

6. This is what pleases you, not burnt offerings and sacrifices."

7. Later, Christ said, "I have come to do your will, O God, just as it is written about me in your book."

8. Notice, He first said, "Sacrifices and burnt offerings are not what pleases you," even though He knew the importance of

the sacrificial system because it was given by God.

9. After that He said, "I have come to do your will." So from this sequence, we see that the first part of God's arrangement was abolished because it was only temporary and typified the reality that was to come.

10. It was because Christ obeyed and did His Father's will, and then offered His own body on the tree, that we are cleansed from sin and accepted as holy; that's why His sacrifice doesn't have to be repeated.

11. Now every day the priests offer the same sacrifices, which can never take away sin. So their work is never done.

12. But when Christ came, He offered one sacrifice for sin forever, and then went and sat down again on the right hand of God because His work on earth was done.

13. Now He's waiting for the time to come when all men, even His enemies, will acknowledge His rightful authority.

14. On the basis of this one sacrifice, Christ can now present us to the universe as a perfect people, because we've been forgiven and our hearts have been changed.

15. This is what God meant, when He spoke through Jeremiah and said,

16. "This is the covenant of faith that I have made and the one I promised to carry out. I will put my laws in their hearts and write them on their minds.

17. I will forgive their sins and not bring up their lawless deeds any more."

18. Now with the reality of forgiveness confirmed, it is no longer necessary to offer symbolic sacrifices for sins.

19. **Therefore**, my brothers, we have complete freedom to come to the Sanctuary in heaven and with confidence come into the presence of God without being afraid.

20. Christ opened the curtain for us to go directly into the heavenly Sanctuary, and in one sense, the open curtain is His human body. He is the One who made all this possible. This was part of God's original promise that we've been talking about, and which our ancestors have been looking forward to for centuries. Thus in Christ's humanity we are in the presence of God.

21. Since we have a High Priest who is fully in charge of God's promise,

22. let us come into God's presence with confidence, with full assurance that our faith is rooted in Him, with hearts cleansed by the blood of Christ from a guilty conscience, and with bodies washed from the filth of this world.

23. Let's hold on firmly and unswervingly to the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. When God gave us His promise, He gave it willingly and did so whether we were worthy to receive it or not. And now He has done what He promised to do.

24. Let's be compassionate to one another and let's give some thought to how we can spur each other on to do more good deeds.

25. Let's not give up the habit of worshipping together and meeting in small groups as some have already done, but let's encourage each other more and more as we see the day approaching.

26. If we deliberately go contrary to the light and truth about Christ, where can we go for a sacrifice for our sins and for power to transform our lives?

27. Then all that we can look forward to is the coming judgment and the fierce fire of God's glory that will consume us and the sin within us to which we so stubbornly clung.

28. In the days of Moses, anyone who disobeyed and stubbornly clung to his sin, once he was judged guilty in the presence of two or three witnesses, was put to death without recourse of appeal,

29. If that happened back then under the law of Moses, how much more certain the punishment is of those who have spurned the Son of God, treated the blood of the covenant of faith as worthless, and insulted the Spirit by rejecting God's grace.

30. The Lord is the One who said, "It is my right to avenge all evil. I will make sure that the sentence against sin is carried out." Moses confirmed this when he said, "The Lord Himself will judge His people."

31. It will be a dreadful experience for those who stand in the presence of the living God facing the consequences of their sins!

32. But now what about you? Do you recall the time when God's truth and light first penetrated your heart? Remember how willing you were to suffer for Him, and you didn't let your troubles and problems overwhelm you or defeat you?

33. Remember how you were put on public display and were laughed at, insulted, and handled roughly? Do you recall how eager you were to defend your faith and how willing you were to join those who were being persecuted for it?

34. You were very compassionate and suffered with me when I was arrested and put in prison. And when your houses were broken into and your belongings seized, you took it in stride. You knew that you possessed a rich spiritual treasure in heaven which no one could take away from you, and that it was rightfully and eternally yours.

35. So don't let go of your confidence in the truth, because it not only brings personal blessings now, but eternal rewards later.

36. You need to hold on to your courage and show a little more endurance in doing the will of God. The time will come when you'll receive what He promised.

37. As the Lord says in the Scriptures, "Just a little while longer and He who did come will come again and will not delay.

38. In the meantime, my people will keep on living by faith, but if they do shrink back, how can I be pleased with them?"

39. Now we are not the kind who shrink back and turn against the truth of God. On the contrary, by faith we hold on to Him, and He will help us to hold on to Him so we can be saved.

CHAPTER 11

1. Now to have faith means to be sure of the things we hope for and to be certain of the things we can't see.

2. This is the kind of faith that gave some of our ancestors a good name and won God's approval.

3. Faith in what God can do not only reaches into the future, but also into the past. By faith we understand that God created the whole universe out of nothing. He simply spoke and it was.

4. This is the kind of faith in God that Abel had when he obeyed and sacrificed a lamb, which was a different sacrifice from what his brother Cain offered. So he won God's approval as being righteous; he did what God told Him to do. That's why God spoke so well of him. And Abel's example of faith and obedience is still speaking to us today, even though he's dead.

5. Enoch had this same faith. He lived a life of obedience, perfectly dedicated to God. That's why he could be translated and taken bodily to heaven without first having to die. One day his family and friends looked for him where he usually walked and talked with God, but couldn't find him, because God had taken him to heaven. The point is that Enoch pleased God while he was still on earth, before he was translated and taken to heaven.

6. It's impossible to obey and please God without having faith. In fact, even our confidence that God is, is based on faith. So to have faith means to believe that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.

7. Noah is another example of having this kind of faith. God told him it would rain, which it had never done before, because the earth was watered by morning mists. Yet, he believed what God said and went ahead to prepare for the coming flood by doing what God told him to do. As a result, his whole family was saved. Today Noah has the reputation of being a righteous man, but that's because of his faith.

8. Abraham, when he was called to leave his comfortable home in the city of Ur in Mesopotamia and to live with his family in tents in a land he was supposed to inherit, he obeyed, even though he didn't know exactly where he was supposed to go.

9. By faith he had to live as a foreigner in the land that God had promised to give him. And Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs to the same promise, also lived as foreigners in the land.

10. Abraham never lost sight of God's promise, including its ultimate fulfilment. So by faith he looked forward to inheriting that better land, and to living in that city that has everlasting foundations, whose

designer and builder is God.

11. It was faith in God's promise that enabled Abraham to become a father and Sarah to become a mother, even though she was too old to have children. God worked a miracle and she conceived and gave birth to a son.

12. So from one old man and his aged wife, whose bodies were as good as dead, came so many descendants that today they are as numerous as the stars in the sky and as difficult to count as grains of sand.

13. Their descendants also lived by faith, and those who died looked forward with confidence to the time when God's promises would be fulfilled. They didn't receive all the things that God had promised, but by faith they took hold of them, treasured them, and were not ashamed to admit that they were strangers and pilgrims on this earth.

14. People who say this make it clear they're looking forward to a better land, one to which they belong and which they call their own.

15. They didn't keep thinking of the country Abraham had left, because if they had wanted to, they could have gone back there to live in comfort rather than wandering around Palestine living in tents.

16. This should tell you that they were looking forward to a better country, a heavenly one. So God is not ashamed of being their God. In fact, He's even prepared a city for them.

17. It was by faith that Abraham sacrificed his son when his love for God was tested. In his own mind, he had already sacrificed Isaac, but God prevented him from carrying it out. Abraham had been promised many descendants, yet he was ready to sacrifice his one and only son.

18. God had said to Abraham, "It is through Isaac that you'll have the descendants that I promised you."

19. Abraham clung to that promise in spite of God's strange request to sacrifice Isaac. It was painful for him to obey, but he reasoned that, because God cannot lie, He would keep His promise by raising Isaac from the dead. In Abraham's mind that's what had already happened, and so, figuratively, he did receive his son back

from the dead.

20. Isaac showed that he had this same faith in God's promise the way he blessed his two sons, Jacob and Esau.

21. By faith Jacob, just before he died, included the two sons of Joseph in his fatherly blessing. He was so feeble, he had to lean on his cane as he blessed them and gave thanks to God.

22. Joseph also gave evidence of this same faith when just before he died, he told the Israelites that one day they would leave Egypt and that, when they left, they should take his body with them.

23. By faith the parents of Moses went against the king's command to kill all baby boys. They were not afraid to hide their son for the first three months of his life, because they believed that he was no ordinary child and that God had a special reason for him to live.

24. Moses showed this same faith all through his youth, and when he became an adult, he refused to become emotionally attached to Egypt, or to sin, or be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

25. He chose to suffer with God's people rather than to enjoy a life of ease in the palace and to taste the pleasures of sin, which last only a short time.

26. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ of more value than all the treasures of Egypt. He kept his eye on the future and the fulfilment of God's promise, looking ahead to his eternal reward.

27. It was faith that made him leave Egypt, not fear. He was not concerned about his future, nor was he afraid of the king. He never changed his mind nor wished to go back to live in Egypt. He was constantly aware of the presence of the invisible One, who stayed by his side.

28. And it was faith that finally made him return to Egypt and to urge the people to keep the Passover the night they were set free. By faith he told them to sprinkle the blood of a lamb on their doorposts so that their firstborn would not be destroyed.

29. By faith the children of Israel left Egypt and made their way toward the Red Sea, which opened up for them, and they walked across on dry ground. When the Egyptian army came after them and tried

to do the same, the sea closed up, and they all drowned.

30. By faith the walls of Jericho collapsed after the children of Israel marched around the city once each day for seven days.

31. Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute living in Jericho, believed in the God of Israel. She had faith in what He would do for His people, and because of that, she welcomed the spies and hid them at the risk of her own life.

32. There are many such people of faith, but there isn't time for me to tell you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets.

33. By faith men and women fought against whole armies and won. They conquered kingdoms, administered justice, received what was promised, and by faith Daniel even stopped the mouths of hungry lions.

34. It was faith that kept the three Hebrew worthies from being burned up when they were ordered by Nebuchadnezzar to be thrown into a blazing furnace. It was faith that kept the Jews from being killed by a jealous Persian administrator. It was faith that turned our people's weakness into strength to defeat entire armies of foreign troops.

35. And by faith women received their dead raised back to life. Then there were others, those who chose torture and death rather than freedom, looking forward by faith to the time of the resurrection.

36. Some of these were mocked and whipped, put in chains and imprisoned, or taken off and sold as slaves.

37. Others were stoned to death, sawn in half while still alive, killed by the sword, beheaded, or tempted with offers of riches and glory. Still others had to go around dressed only in sheepskins or goatskins; they were poor, persecuted, and mistreated.

38. For them the world was not worth losing their hold on God. So they became refugees and wandered in deserts and mountains, making their homes in caves and holes in the ground.

39. What a record of faith all these people have left us! What compliments

they all deserve. Yet they didn't receive what God promised,

40. because God wanted them to wait, so together He can take us all to heaven at the same time.

CHAPTER 12

1. **Therefore**, seeing we are surrounded with such great men and women of faith, let's rid ourselves of everything that holds us back from having this same kind of faith, especially the sin of doubting that so easily holds on to every one of us. And let's run the course that is marked out for us with the same determination as those who run in the games.

2. As we run our course, let's keep our eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith, the One in whom our faith rests, who for the joy that awaited Him, endured the cross, set aside its shame and disgrace, and then ascended to heaven and sat down at the right hand of God, where He now is.

3. If you would stop to think what He went through, and what hatred He had to put up with from sinners, you wouldn't become so discouraged and feel like giving up your faith.

4. After all, you have not yet been in a situation in which you had to resist sin and to hold on to your faith to the point of sweating blood in prayer, and then be forsaken by God and killed.

5. Have you forgotten those words of encouragement we received from God when He spoke through Solomon and said, "My son, don't get discouraged when the Lord corrects you, and don't give up when the Lord tells you that you're wrong.

6. The Lord corrects everyone He loves, and He disciplines everyone who becomes His son." And a true son expects his father to discipline him. That's how a son knows that his father loves him.

7. So don't give up your faith, but look at your present hardships as discipline. God thinks of you as His own sons, and what son is not disciplined by a loving father?

8. If God didn't discipline you, He would not be relating to you as a good father relates to his sons, but He would be

relating to us as illegitimate children, someone else's sons, not His own.

9. We've all had fathers which had to discipline us and we respected them for it, even though we didn't like it. Shouldn't we have much more respect for God and be willing to submit ourselves to His discipline? After all, He is our heavenly Father and from Him we've already received a taste of eternal life and the promise of immortality to come.

10. Our earthly parents disciplined us for a few short years as they saw best, and at times for their own good, but our heavenly Father disciplines us for our good, not His, in order to develop in us a likeness of His holiness and character.

11. At the time, such discipline isn't always pleasant. In fact, it can be quite painful. But after it's all over, it brings a harvest of righteousness and peace to those who have accepted the discipline as part of their training.

12. So don't walk around with sagging shoulders and bent knees.

13. As the Scriptures say, "Consider where you're going and take only the ways that are firm, turning neither to the right nor to the left." So be an example to those who are weak to keep them from giving up their faith. They need to be spiritually healed so they can become strong.

14. Do your utmost to be at peace with everyone, to reflect the virtues of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to keep on living that holy life, without which no one will ever see God.

15. Be careful not to hinder God's grace from working in your life by letting all kinds of bitterness take hold of you, which will only hurt you and a lot of others.

16. Let no one become sexually immoral, or careless as did Esau, who for a meal of lentils sold his birthright to spiritual leadership because he was hungry.

17. Afterward he tried to get it back, but couldn't, even though he cried his heart out.

18. Now, our spiritual pilgrimage is not supposed to take us back to that day when our ancestors stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai. They stood there trembling as they saw the top of the mountain ablaze with the

fire of God's presence. Thick dark clouds rolled down the sides of the mountain and covered it completely from view. From out of the clouds flashed lightning, followed by sounds of thunder that made the earth shake.

19. Suddenly, there came a blast like the sound of a trumpet and then a voice that sounded like the distant roar of a great waterfall as God spoke the Ten Commandments. When our ancestors heard that voice, they begged God to stop speaking and not to say another word because they were afraid they would die.

20. Moses had told them: "If man or beast so much as ventures toward the foot of the mountain, he must be stoned to death."

21. What they saw was so terrifying that even Moses said, "I'm shaking with fright."

22. However, you're no longer standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai, but at the foot of Mt. Zion, the heavenly mountain. You've come to the city of the living God, to the Jerusalem that's above, where thousands of angels joyfully and happily come into God's presence.

23. And we are just as much a part of the heavenly family as they are, because we are God's born-again children. Our names are written in the books of heaven, and we have all the spiritual rights of a first-born. We have joyfully come into the presence of God, who is the Judge of all the earth, and have joined righteous men from everywhere, who in their hearts and minds are already there.

24. And we've come to Jesus, the Mediator of the covenant of faith, who died for our sins, and whose blood is more precious than the blood of righteous Abel, who was the first human to die for God.

25. But, you need to be careful not to refuse to hear what God has to say. If our ancestors didn't escape the consequences of refusing to hear what God said to them through Moses at Sinai, do you think that we will escape the consequences of refusing to hear what God is saying to us through His Son from heaven?

26. When God spoke at Mt. Sinai, His voice shook the earth, and He has promised to shake the earth again. Through the

prophet Haggai He said, "One more time I will shake the earth, and not only the earth, but also the of heavens."

27. The words "one more time," refer to the end of the world. This shaking will not only be literal, but also spiritual. Everything that can be shaken will be shaken, so that which cannot be shaken will remain.

28. Therefore, let us be thankful that we are part of a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Let us worship God acceptably, with hearts full of love and gratitude, but also full of reverence and awe.

29. Our God is not only gracious and forgiving, but His presence is also a consuming fire.

CHAPTER 13

1. **Keep** on loving one another as Christian brothers should.

2. Don't forget to make strangers feel welcome in your meetings and in your homes, because those who have done this in the past have sometimes entertained angels without knowing it.

3. Remember those who are in prison, and be one with them as if you were also in prison. Remember those who are suffering, especially those who are suffering because of their faith, and identify with them as if you were suffering.

4. Marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure. Everyone should understand that sex is allowed only within marriage, and that God will call to account all those who are immoral and commit adultery. In the meanwhile, they reap the consequences of their sins.

5. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be happy and content with what you have. God said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

6. So let us say with David, "The Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me to take me away from the Lord?"

7. Don't forget the church leaders in your prayers, especially those who brought you God's message. Think back on all the good they did and follow their example.

8. But the best example is Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and

forever.

9. Don't let your faith become unbalanced by every kind of strange doctrine that comes along. Get your inspiration from the Holy Spirit, not from some misdirected zeal someone has. Receive inner strength from God's grace, not from following rules about what to eat, which can't give us the spiritual strength we need.

10. Let's look back for a moment at the earthly Sanctuary again. Now the priests who served in the place of worship had no right to eat from the sacrifice once it was on the altar. But we have an altar, and on it is a sacrifice from which we can eat.

11. Also notice that on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest took the blood of the slain animal into the Sanctuary as a sacrifice for sin, but not its meat. In fact, the animal had to be taken outside the camp where it was burned.

12. That's why Jesus was not crucified inside the city, but outside, and His body was buried there. His death did not tell us to continue the practices carried out in Jerusalem. It is His blood that cleanses us from sin, not what we eat.

13. So let's follow Him and go outside the bounds of Jewish thinking, and be willing to bear the shame and disgrace for Him that He bore for us.

14. We have nothing permanent here and no city which we can call our own. But we look for a city that's still to come and to which we belong.

15. So through Jesus, let's bring to God a continual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Let's confess with our lips the reality of what Jesus Christ has done, and praise His holy name.

16. Let's not forget to do good and to help one another. This is the most pleasing sacrifice you can ever give to God.

17. **Respect** your leaders and listen to what they have to say. They're carrying tremendous responsibilities and are burdened for all the churches and their members, because they know they must give account to God for what they do. Your attitude will help them to carry their burdens joyfully instead of with grief, which would not help the church.

18. So keep praying for them, and pray for us, too, because even though we feel we have a clear conscience, we do want to continue doing what is right and to act honorably at all times.

19. I beg you to pray even more earnestly that God will let me come to see you soon.

20. Now may the God of peace who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, who died for us and sealed the covenant of faith by His own blood,

21. equip you with everything you need to do His will. May He work in you and through you what is pleasing to Him through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

22. In closing, I beg you, my brothers, to listen carefully to this letter of instruction and encouragement as it is read to you; it isn't very long.

23. In the meanwhile, I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released from prison, for which we're all thankful. And if he comes to see me soon, we can then come together to see you.

24. Give our greetings to your local leaders and to all the members there, all of whom God considers His precious saints. The brothers and sisters from Italy send their greetings.

25. May God's grace be with all of you. Amen.

JAMES

CHAPTER 1

1. **From** James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the believers who are God's people scattered among many nations.

2. My brothers, don't be sad when troubles come your way, but look at them as opportunities to spiritually enrich yourselves.

3. When your faith in God is tested, and it survives the test, it will be stronger and will be able to endure more than before.

4. So don't be afraid to let your faith in God be tested, and as it survives and matures, you will mature as well. And then you'll be ready to face any test that comes along.

5. Now if any of you need wisdom, ask God, who willingly gives it graciously and generously to all who ask Him for it.

6. However, when you pray, do so with confidence, believing that God will answer when and where He sees best. A person who believes this and then doubts, going back and forth, is like a wave of the sea blown by the wind.

7. The Lord will not answer this man's prayer because he can't make up his own mind.

8. This kind of person usually isn't certain about anything else he does in life.

9. Now the believer who is poor should rejoice when God answers his prayer in a way that lifts him up.

10. And the believer who is well-to-do should be just as glad when God answers his prayer in a way to keep him humble, because some day everything he has will be gone.

11. A man's life is like a flower in the field. It blossoms in the morning when the sun comes up, by noon it feels the burning heat, by the afternoon it begins to droop, and by that night its beauty is gone and it dies. That's how short a man's life is when put in perspective to God's time frame, and it doesn't matter how rich and successful he's been.

12. Real happiness and lasting joy comes when, under pressure, a man en-

dures the test of his faith and remains faithful to God. He knows that after this life he's guaranteed everlasting life as a crowning reward for his loyalty. This is what the Lord has promised to all who love Him.

13. So when a person's loyalty to God is tested, he shouldn't blame God for the evil to test his faith. God is not the originator of evil, nor does He go around trying to push people away from Him to see how strong their faith is and whether they can hold on to Him or not.

14. The temptations we wrestle with and the spiritual struggles we go through largely come from inside of us, from our own evil desires and fantasies, and when we give in to them, we are lured away from God.

15. Let's never think that to be honest with ourselves means to look to our feelings as a guide to what is right. Emotions change and can hatch a whole host of evil desires, and when these desires grow and mature, they give birth to sin, and sin gives birth to death.

16. So don't deceive yourselves, my dear brothers.

17. Now everything good in life is a gift from heaven, because it comes from the Father of lights, who neither changes or turns the other way.

18. No one prompted Him to create us. He made us of His own free will, lovingly and tenderly, with all the risks involved. He created us by the power of His word and placed us in charge of this world and all its creatures.

19. **Remember**, my brothers, that as a people we should be eager to listen to what God says, and be careful what we say and make doubly sure that whatever we say we don't say angrily.

20. You see, when a person is angry, God can't magnify His name through him or even get through to him to help him to do what's right.

21. That's why we need to get rid of any bad traits we might have and change our behavior to what it should be. We need to be teachable and to accept God's

word into our hearts with all honesty. Also, we need to nourish every trait in us which will keep us close to God.

22. Don't deceive yourselves into thinking that all you have to do is listen to sermons without putting them into practice.

23. Whoever listens to the preaching of God's word and doesn't put into practice what he's heard, is like a man who takes a good look in a mirror,

24. sees himself as he really is, and then goes away and ignores everything he just saw.

25. But a person who carefully looks in the mirror of God's word will see that God's law is perfect, a law of liberty intent on seeing him set free from sin and from his own selfish desires. And if he doesn't ignore what he just heard or read, but will do something about it, God will bless him in what he does.

26. Now if anyone thinks he's a good Christian and can't control himself or what he says, he's only fooling himself. His Christianity is worthless.

27. Genuine Christianity is the kind that looks after the needs of others, especially suffering orphans and widows. This is the kind of religion that our heavenly Father is looking for in all of His people.

CHAPTER 2

1. My brothers, you can't say that you're a believer in Jesus Christ, our glorious Lord, and respect some people more than you do others.

2. If a person comes to your meetings dressed expensively and in the latest clothes, maybe even wearing some gold jewelry, and another person comes in dressed rather shabbily,

3. and you greet the well-dressed person extremely graciously and with great respect show him to the best seats near the front, and say to him, "You may sit here, sir," and then you turn to the rather shabbily dressed person and say to him, "You can stand back there or sit here on the floor,"

4. aren't you being partial and judging people's hearts by the clothes they wear? If that's the case, doesn't that tell

you something about yourself and your own perverted sense of values?

5. Listen to me, my brothers, doesn't God prefer to take the shabbily dressed people to heaven, who are poor in this world's goods, yet rich in faith, rather than those who are rich and ignore what God says? Isn't it the poor who are rich in faith who are God's heirs and will inherit the kingdom? Yet, God has promised the kingdom to everyone who loves Him, whether they're rich or poor.

6. But what are you doing? You're looking down your nose at the poor while the rich are the ones to whom you give all your attention. Yet in the present situation we're in, it's mainly the rich people who are oppressing you and having you dragged into court.

7. And these are the same people who are cursing Jesus Christ, the very One by whose name we're called and to whom we belong.

8. Now if you want to live by the royal law of liberty, then you need to do what it says in the Scriptures, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." Now if you do this, you're doing what's right.

9. But if you show more respect for some people than for others just because they're rich and well dressed, you're sinning, and according to heaven's law, you're a lawbreaker.

10. What you need to understand is that, whoever is partial toward people is guilty of breaking the whole law, not just one part of it.

11. Let me show you what I mean. The same God who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you don't commit adultery, but you murder someone, aren't you a lawbreaker?

12. So live as people who are under the law of liberty, which is an instrument in the hands of God to keep us from falling under the tyranny of sin.

13. Now when probation closes, God's mercy will be withdrawn, yet even in the judgment He will show mercy to those who have been unmerciful.

14. My brothers, what good is it if a person says that he believes in the Lord

Jesus Christ, but his actions tell a different story? Can his verbal statements about his relationship with Christ save him?

15. When brothers and sisters in desperate need of clothing and food come to you for help,

16. and you say to them, "We feel badly. We're so sorry. God bless you. We will certainly pray for you. Keep warm and be filled and may the God of peace be with you," but you don't do anything for them, what good is your statement of faith?

17. This would mean that your belief in Christ is worthless. It's good for nothing. Without action your faith is as good as dead.

18. Now someone will come up with a smart answer and say that different people have different gifts, one has faith and the other has actions. My response to that is this: How can people tell if your faith in Christ is real, if they don't see you doing something for someone? On the other hand, people can easily see that my faith in Christ is real because of what I do, not what I say.

19. You believe in one God? Good! But the devils also believe, and they even stand in awe of Him.

20. How foolish can you be to believe that faith without action is good enough. Do you want me to draw you a picture? Do I have to prove to you that real faith in God is best seen by what you do for others?

21. How do you know that Abraham's relationship with God and his great faith in Him was real? Wasn't it because he was willing to offer up his beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice?

22. Can't you see that his faith in God and his actions worked together? His actions gave evidence of his faith. In other words, His faith was seen to be real by what he did.

23. The Scriptures are right when they say, "Abraham believed God and because of what he did, his faith was seen as righteousness." That's why God called him His friend.

24. So you can see that only by our actions can others tell whether or not our faith is real. Therefore, a man is put right

in the sight of God by actions that confirm his faith, not merely by a do-nothing faith.

25. It was the same with Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute who lived in Jericho. She demonstrated her faith in God by what she did when she welcomed the Jewish spies, hid them, and then helped them escape, and she did this at the risk of her own life. That's how we know her faith was real.

26. And so just as a person's body is useless without breath, so our statements of faith are meaningless without action.

CHAPTER 3

1. **Another** thing I want to mention to you, my brothers, is this. Don't think that every one of you should be put into office as a leader or a teacher. What you first need to realize is that God expects much more of leaders and teachers than of others. This means that we are held accountable for much more than our members are.

2. Now all of us make mistakes and say things we shouldn't. But if someone can control his tongue and never make a mistake in what he says, he'll be a perfect man and be able to keep his whole body in check.

3. So that's where we should begin, particularly those of us who are leaders, control our tongues. That's how we control a horse. We put a bit in its mouth and control its whole body, and the horse does whatever we want it to do.

4. Look at a big ship. It can be pushed along only by strong winds filling its sails. Yet it can be controlled by a very small rudder and made to go wherever the captain wants it to go.

5. That's how important the tongue is. If we can control it, we can keep our whole body in check. As small as the tongue is, it can surely say a mouthful and do a lot of damage. It only takes a little flame to set a whole forest on fire.

6. The tongue is just like that. It can set emotions on fire and create a whole world of evil. And since the tongue is part of our own body, it can create in us even more bad feelings than the ones we may already have, if we let it keep on talking about how badly we feel. The tongue can

set the whole atmosphere of a church on fire. When that happens, it's just as if the church had been set on fire by the flames of hell.

7. Men have been able to tame all kinds of creatures such as wild animals, birds, snakes, and even large fish.

8. But one thing man hasn't been able to tame, and that's his own tongue. It is the most mischievous and uncontrollable of all creation, and it can cause the worst kind of evil and spread the deadliest poison you can know.

9. If not disciplined and controlled, one minute the tongue can praise and bless God, and the next minute it can turn around and curse those created in God's image.

10. All too often, words of blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth. These things shouldn't be. Something is wrong.

11. Can good and bitter tasting water bubble out of the same spring?

12. Can a fig tree grow olives? Can a grapevine grow figs? Can a salty spring give you fresh water? Think seriously about this, my brothers.

13. If you're wise enough to understand what I'm talking about, then prove it by your uplifting conversation and your good deeds, and do it without going around boasting about how good you are.

14. If you have any bitterness, anger, or jealousy in your heart, I hope you won't have the audacity to tell others how committed to the Lord you are, because it won't take long before people will discover the truth. That will discredit the gospel truth quicker than anything I know.

15. The wisdom that tells you that you can harbor bitterness and still be a Christian is not from above. It's the world's way of doing things. It's devilish, and certainly not consistent with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

16. You can be sure that, wherever you find people expressing anger and jealousy, you'll find things in disarray, and all kinds of other evils.

17. The wisdom that comes from above is first of all harmless, then peaceable, gentle, innocent, easy to get along with, compassionate, full of good works, and

free from partiality and hypocrisy.

18. Such fruit will come from seeds of right-doing, sown in peace by those who love peace.

CHAPTER 4

1. Where do all the fights and quarrels among you come from? Don't they start because of your own tempers and passions that are inside of you?

2. You want certain things and can't get them. You want your own way and can't get it. So you quarrel and fight and are ready to kill to get what you want, and you don't get it because you don't ask God for it.

3. And even if you do ask God for it, you still don't get it because you're asking for the wrong reason. You want certain things to use for your own selfish pleasure, and you want certain things to go your way so you can get the credit.

4. In this sense, you're no different from fornicators and adulterers. They're also interested in their own pleasures. Don't you know that living like the world and loving it means being at odds with God and with what He has in mind for you? Anyone who is this passionate for pleasure or worldly recognition cannot at the same time be a friend of God.

5. Do you think that the Scriptures are meaningless when they say, "God longs for man to be what He intended him to be."

6. Why do you think He has offered us the power of His grace? He has offered us His grace to change us. The Scriptures say, "God continues to give His grace to those who are teachable, not to those who are proud."

7. What you need to do is to make yourself listen to what God says and stop listening to the devil's prompting. In fact, if you confront the devil, he'll flee from you.

8. Stay close to God, and He'll stay close to you. Wash your hands of those bad things you've been saying and doing and stop being hypocritical.

9. You need to repent and be sorry for your sins, and don't be afraid to shed some tears over your misbehavior; it'll do you

good. After that you need to make an effort to change your ways. Being sorry is not enough. If you're genuinely sorry, you'll not only give up your fighting, but also your gossiping and criticizing.

10. When you really want to change your ways, and you admit your inability to do so, then God can step in to help you. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.

11. My brothers, don't slander one another. Anyone who speaks to destroy his brother sets himself up as judge and speaks against God's law. When you think that you're more important than the law, you're judging the rightness of the law; you're not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

12. Yet, we all know that God is the only real Lawgiver and Judge because He's the only One who can give life and take it. So who do you think you are when you criticize and judge others about keeping His law?

13. Now listen. You make all kinds of plans and you say to yourselves, "Today, we will do this and tomorrow we will do that. We'll go to the city over there and open a business, and in the first year or so we should make a good profit."

14. How do you know you'll live that long? Life can be here today and gone tomorrow. Life can end as quickly as a puff of smoke which you suddenly see, and then it's gone.

15. You should say something like this: "If the Lord is willing that we live, then we will do this today and that tomorrow."

16. But presently, you're so sure of yourselves, and so proud of your plans and of what you're going to accomplish that you're blind. If only you would stop long enough to look at yourselves, you would quickly see that what I'm talking about is your whole attitude. It's bad.

17. And the person who knows what's right and doesn't change his ways is in love with sin.

CHAPTER 5

1. **Now** listen carefully, those of you who love to be rich. The time will come when you will weep because of all the

troubles and difficulties you'll be facing.

2. Your money and property will be worthless and you'll have nothing to wear but your moth-eaten clothes.

3. Your investments in gold and silver will depreciate before your very eyes. Like old rusted coins that misers keep, your worthless money will remind you how miserly you've really been. The loss of your investments will burn in your memory like fire. You've hoarded your riches and they've come to nothing. In the last days your money will be worthless and your riches will be gone.

4. You have not paid the people who are working for you an honest wage. This injustice on your part has caused them to cry out to God for help and the Lord has heard.

5. You have lived in luxury, and nothing but pleasure was your aim. You've become fat and lazy as if you were preparing yourself for slaughter.

6. You've even condemned and sentenced to death innocent men just to get your way, and no one dared to resist you.

7. My fellow believers, be patient. You'll see a different situation when the Lord comes. Look at the way the farmer lives and learn a lesson. He sows the seed and then he patiently waits for the harvest. He watches for the early rains in the spring and then for the latter rains in the fall until the grain is ripe.

8. You need to be as patient as the farmer is because you know that someday the Lord will come. You need to settle it in your heart once and for all that the Lord will come and set things right.

9. So don't grumble at each other, my brothers. God notices this, and it hurts Him to see you do it. Besides, what would you do if the Lord would come right now and find you in a grumbling frame of mind? How badly you would feel.

10. Brothers, if you want examples of patience and endurance in suffering, look at the prophets of old who spoke for the Lord.

11. We look back and admire them as being great people, but that's because they suffered for what they believed and held firmly to the Lord until the end. Look at

Job and his experience. He lost everything he had, he suffered physically, and yet he never let go of the Lord. When it was all over, the Lord showed him much compassion and kindness.

12. Above everything else, my brothers, be truthful. Don't try to let people know how honest you are by swearing that you're telling the truth. Just say "yes" or "no" and keep your word, and no one will condemn you for that.

13. Are any of you suffering from misfortune? Take it to the Lord in prayer. He'll give you the strength to get through it. Are you happy? Then sing about it and praise the Lord for it.

14. Are any of you sick? Then call the elders of the church and ask them to pray for you. They'll anoint you with oil and call on the name of the Lord to heal you.

15. This kind of prayer for the sick, when offered in faith and confidence, can heal them and restore them to health. Also, if a sick person turns to the Lord and confesses his sins, he will be forgiven, and this, too, will help him to get well.

16. So then, admit your faults to each other and confess your sins to God. Pray

for each other, and the sick among you will be forgiven, and if it's God's will, they will be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has tremendous power.

17. Look at Elijah. He was an ordinary person and subject to all kinds of emotional ups and downs just as we are, but he was a good man and committed to the Lord. He prayed and asked God to hold back the rain to convince the people that the pagan god they worshiped was not the one giving them water. The Lord heard, and it didn't rain for three years and six months.

18. Then after the people acknowledged that the Lord was God, Elijah prayed for rain, and the rains came, and once again the land produced crops.

19. My brothers, if someone wanders away from the truth, and one of you brings him back to the Lord, you saved a life for eternity.

20. And by so doing, you not only saved this person from eternal ruin, but also covered a multitude of sins which will never need to be exposed and shown to the universe.

I PETER

CHAPTER 1

1. This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, and is sent to God's people scattered throughout the regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia Minor, and Bithynia.

2. You are God's chosen ones and were made such by your response to the Holy Spirit's action on your hearts. This is just what God the Father hoped you would do. And because of your response, He could purify you by the blood of Jesus Christ and lead you into grateful obedience. Peace and grace be yours, pressed down and running over.

3. Let's thank God the Father, who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, for giving us fresh hope for a new life by raising Jesus from the dead.

4. So now we can look beyond this present world to an indestructible inheritance, and to a totally new society which is waiting for us in the heavens.

5. All these blessings are waiting for you, and God has personally guaranteed them. You can be sure that if you continue to love Him, He will save you. He will never leave His people, but will be with them to the very close of time, and that's when His power to save will be seen by everyone.

6. So keep your minds focused on this hope and be glad for it, even though you're somewhat disheartened by all the troubles you've been going through right now.

7. For the Christian, there's even value in troubles. These experiences are testing your faith in God and are more valuable to you than gold, even though you might feel as if you're passing through the fires of hell. When Jesus Christ comes, He'll praise you for your courage and steadfastness, and you'll be honored before the whole universe.

8. I know you're enduring all this for Him because you love Him, even though you've never met Him or seen Him, and also because you're grateful for what He has done for you.

9. You've already received the goal of your faith, which is the salvation of your

souls.

10. This is the mystery of salvation that the prophets themselves tried to understand, even after they had written down what God had shown them. They marveled at God's grace as in vision they saw it come to reality in Jesus Christ, which has happened in your time and mine.

11. They tried to figure out the exact time the Holy Spirit was talking about when He told them about the sufferings of Christ and the joys to follow.

12. They knew that their prophecies were not given for their own times, but for our time. And these are the same prophecies that we preached to you as God's good news, and our preaching was verified by the Holy Spirit at the time of Pentecost. These are the mysterious workings of God that even the angels would like to better understand.

13. Therefore, gather up the loose ends of your thinking, stay alert, and be ready for action. Set your hope totally on Jesus Christ, what He has done for you, and what He will do for you when He returns.

14. As God's born-again children, continue to show how much confidence you have in Him by obeying Him. Don't be controlled by the same emotions that controlled you before you heard about Jesus Christ.

15. But live the kind of life God wants you to live, which is the same kind that Jesus lived when He was here.

16. This is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "Be holy because I am holy."

17. When you pray to God and call Him your Father, remember that He has no favorites in His family, but loves everyone equally. He uses the same standard for all and judges each one of us by what we have done.

18. He loves you very much, and you know this by the price He was willing to pay for you. He did this because He wanted to set you free from the futility of your life handed down to you by your forefathers. So your freedom from sin was not paid for with silver and gold or with

the monies of this world,

19. but with the precious blood of the Son of God, a prized lamb without flaw or blemish.

20. This arrangement was made among the Godhead even before They created this world. And with centuries of this world's history behind us, you are the ones who have been given the privilege of sharing in the reality of God's gift.

21. It was because of Jesus Christ, who came to this earth to live and die and was then raised from the dead and taken to heaven, that you can now believe what God said. So your faith and hope are no longer grounded in what you can do, but in what God can do.

22. And now that you've accepted this truth and changed your life, don't forget to love your brothers and sisters in the faith and to do so with all your heart.

23. You have been born again, not from perishable human seed, nor by any power inherent in you, but from imperishable divine seed through the word of God.

24. As the Scriptures say, "All human life is like grass, and all human striving are like the flowers of the field. The grass dries up and dies and the flowers fade and fall,

25. but the word of the Lord abides forever." And that's the word that was preached to you when we shared with you the good news about Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 2

1. **Therefore**, get rid of all wickedness in your life such as envy, jealousy, hypocrisy, lying, deceitfulness, bad language, and double standards.

2. Feed on God's word as newborn babies feed on milk, so you can grow up and become spiritually strong.

3. As the Scriptures say, "When you feed on God's word you will find out how good and kind God is."

4. Also stay close to the Lord, who is like that huge rock that the builders of Solomon's Temple first rejected as being useless and later found it to be the very rock they needed for the Temple's cornerstone. It was God who led them back to this precious rock.

5. And He has chosen Jesus Christ to be the living Rock for His spiritual temple. This makes you living stones to be used by God to build this spiritual house. And not only that, but you're also priests, and Jesus Christ is our High Priest. So you know the kind of sacrifices and offerings that are needed for this spiritual house by looking at the obedient life and willing death of Jesus Christ.

6. In the Scriptures, God says it this way: "I am laying in Zion a most precious Cornerstone, One which I have personally chosen, and whoever believes in this Stone and builds on it will never be disappointed."

7. You can see how precious this Stone is to God and how important it is to you. But to those who don't believe in this Stone, the Scriptures say, "The Stone which the builders of the Temple rejected turned out to be the only Stone that could bear the weight of the Temple."

8. Again the Scriptures say, "Some people will trip and stumble over this Stone because it offends them, but it's a Rock that they can't ignore." So you can expect some people to reject God's word and His plan of salvation because in the center of it all is the Lord Jesus Christ.

9. But you're different; you're special. You're a chosen group of people, a royal priesthood of believers, a spiritual nation, and God's very own children. His purpose is for you to live a holy life and praise Him for what He has done. He is the One who has made it possible for you to come out of darkness and fear and into the light and freedom of Jesus Christ.

10. At one time you didn't even know about God's plan to save you, much less that you were a special people. But now you know. Before this, you had no idea of God's great kindness, but now you've experienced it. Now you know how special you are to Him.

11. I appeal to you as a people whom I have learned to love and respect. You have freely chosen to be pilgrims and strangers in a world alien to God, so don't let yourselves be enticed to leave the Lord. If you do leave Him, it will be to the hurt of your own souls.

12. Your conduct among pagans should be so honest and above reproach that, even though they falsely accuse you of being evil-doers, they will one day have to admit that your deeds were good.

13. **That's** why I want you to be good citizens and obey the laws of the land as handed down by the king or by those in authority.

14. I also want you to obey the those who have been commissioned to maintain law and order and to keep the peace. They have the right to punish the disorderly and authority to honor those who are good.

15. God wants you to help stop the rumors and ignorant talk of foolish people by the good things they see you do. He wants you to let them see the power of the gospel in your lives and what it has done for you.

16. **That's** why I want you to live as a free people, with a free spirit, but not to use your freedom to do as you please. But I want you to live as an honored and trusted servant of Jesus Christ, which you have chosen to be.

17. Be respectful to everyone. Love your brothers and sisters in Christ. Don't lose your reverence and respect for God. Honor the king and those in charge of the government.

18. Now some of you have been brought here from other countries as slaves to serve the Romans. You have an extra burden to carry, but you, too, should respect and honor those who are over you. Do what they tell you to do, and listen not only to those who are kind, but also to those who are harsh.

19. God will help you and fortify your spirit so you'll be able to take the pain of undeserved beatings without anger and retaliation. You can do this because inside you're a free man, and you know what Jesus Christ had to suffer for you.

20. Now if you receive a beating for being bad or for having defied your master, what credit does this bring to God? But if you receive a beating when you've been good, and show no anger and don't fight back, then people will notice that you're different. **That's** how God can show His power through you.

21. This is the kind of ministry to which you've been called. Christ also had to suffer, and He left us an example to follow.

22. Christ never sinned and never lied to avoid pain.

23. When they insulted Him, He never answered back with another insult. When they beat Him, He did not retaliate or threaten them with eventual destruction. But He committed Himself into the hands of His heavenly Father, who sees and knows everything.

24. He even let His body be crucified, not only to pay for our sins, but also that we might die to sin and live for God as He did. It is by His suffering and sacrifice that we've been healed.

25. Before you knew Him, you were like sheep who had lost their way, but now you've been found and brought back to the fold to follow the Shepherd of your souls.

CHAPTER 3

1. **Now** these same principles that we've been talking about apply also to husbands and wives. If a Christian woman is married to a non-Christian man, and he doesn't believe what God says, her conduct and life may yet convince him of the reality of the gospel and that what God says is true.

2. He will see the purity and reverence in her life, and will have to admit that her faith is real.

3. The beauty about a woman is not what she does to herself on the outside, the way she fixes her hair, the jewelry she wears, or the clothes she wears.

4. The real beauty of a woman is on the inside, that ageless charm of a gentle and tender spirit, which in God's sight is priceless.

5. This is the kind of beauty the devout women of the past concerned themselves about. They made themselves attractive by putting their hope and trust in God, and honoring and respecting their husbands.

6. That was Sarah's way of beautifying herself. She honored and respected her husband, and when talking to others

about him, she would refer to him as Master Abraham. If you do as she did, then you're Sarah's daughters. So don't concern yourselves with what others say or think, but about what's right.

7. This same principle applies to men. Husbands should relate to their wives with thoughtfulness and understanding. They should recognize their responsibility to honor and respect them as gentle and tender partners and as heirs together with them of the life to come. If husbands treat their wives otherwise, how can they expect God to answer their prayers?

8. **Finally**, let me say this to all of you. Hold on to your Christlike attitude, be compassionate, love each other as brothers and sisters should, and be kind and courteous to everyone.

9. Don't respond to evil with evil or to cursing with cursing. When people curse you, bless them, because that's what God expects you to do, now that you're His born-again children. That's how Jesus Christ responded to you when you cursed Him before you really knew Him.

10. As the Scriptures say, "Anyone who loves life and wants to see good days should stop saying bad things about other people and stop telling lies.

11. He should stop doing evil and start doing good. He should try with all that is within him to be at peace with everyone.

12. The Lord watches for those things in the lives of the righteous and gladly answers their prayers for help. But He will not cooperate with those who do evil and bring about dissension and bitterness."

13. So who's going to stop you from going around doing good? No one.

14. But even if you have to suffer for doing good, you're still the one who's being blessed. As the Scriptures say, "Don't fear their threats, and don't be afraid to do what's right."

15. Continue to give the Lord Jesus Christ the most honored place in your life. In that way you'll always be ready to give an answer to people when they ask you what this hope is that's bubbling up inside of you. And don't be afraid to tell them who gives you this hope.

16. Don't answer harshly as if you're

on the defensive, but be kind and respectful. Thus, your conscience will be clear, and those who speak evil of you will be ashamed of what they've said.

17. If you do have to suffer, God would rather have you suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

18. **Christ** had to suffer because of the misdeeds of others. He was innocent and good, but in order to bring us back to God, He took our sins on Himself and then let Himself be mistreated and be put to death. He died for our sins once and for all, an innocent man for those who are guilty. Although they killed His body, they couldn't kill His love for His Father, and so He was resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit and taken back to heaven.

19. Now Christ came not only to work out your salvation and mine, but He also worked through the power of the Holy Spirit for the salvation of people in the past, offering to set them free from the prison house of sin.

20. This was the case in Noah's day, when Christ preached through him and offered the people a way of escape. But they didn't listen and kept right on sinning. God patiently waited for one hundred twenty years for them to change their minds, all the while that Noah was building the ark. When the rains finally came, only eight people decided to come into the ark and be saved.

21. Figuratively speaking, these eight were baptized by those flood waters and that's why their lives were spared. This is what happened to you when you were saved. You went through those baptismal waters and came out clean. I'm not talking about washing away bodily dirt. All you have to do to have a clean body is to take a bath. What I'm talking about is the pledge you made to God, coming from a good conscience and a clean heart. And your salvation is made sure by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

22. who has gone to heaven and now sits on the right hand of God, having been given full authority once again, over all the angels and beings throughout the universe.

CHAPTER 4

1. So, since Christ suffered for you, you, too, might have to suffer for Him. Now the best preparation is to think about things the same way He did. He suffered, not because He was involved in sin, but because He was opposed to sin and committed to doing the will of God.

2. That's how you should live the rest of your time on earth. Commit yourself to doing the will of God, no longer letting yourself be controlled by human desires.

3. Some of you have already spent too much time in your life doing what you shouldn't do. Before you knew Christ, you spent your life in indecency, lust, drunkenness, sexual orgies, and in taking part in the disgusting practices going on in pagan temples.

4. People who knew you then are surprised to see the change in you. They can't believe their ears when you refuse their invitations to join them in the wild and reckless life that you participated in before. Yet these are the same people who now insult you and accuse you of being bad because you're a Christian.

5. Some day they will have to give account to God, who judges both the living and the dead.

6. That's why the good news of forgiveness was preached even to those who have long been dead. The Holy Spirit will resurrect them because they, too, will have to be judged by the way they lived. But what God wants is for people to let the Holy Spirit change them, so they can triumph over sin as Christ did.

7. **Considering** the times in which we live, the end may come to us individually quicker than we think. So stay awake and always be in an attitude of prayer, no matter what you're doing.

8. Above everything else, hold on to your love for each other. This kind of relationship with your brothers and sisters in the faith will cover many sins.

9. Continue to practice hospitality and invite each other home, and don't do it because you have to, but because you want to, willingly and happily.

10. Remember that each one of you is a manager of God's different gifts. So use

the gifts He's given you to help others. That's why He's given them to you.

11. For instance, whoever preaches should preach God's word with conviction. Whoever cares for someone's physical needs should do it sincerely. This way, people will see in everything you do the same kind of caring spirit that Jesus had, and they will honor and praise God for it. We, too, need to praise the Lord Jesus Christ, because all glory and honor rightfully belong to Him, both now and forever. Amen.

12. Don't be surprised, however, if you have to suffer for Him. Don't be surprised when your faith in Him is tested. This is not something strange and unusual that's happening, and it's not only happening to you.

13. You should be glad when you have to suffer for Him, because in that way you'll know how much you really love Him. Also, you'll have much more in common with Him when you meet Him at His coming.

14. The good side to what you're going through for Christ is that the Holy Spirit is using you to tell others about God. You know, people think that they can insult God by insulting you. But in spite of their insults, they end up respecting God because they can see what He's done for you.

15. As I mentioned before, being punished as a murderer, or a thief, or simply a nuisance in the neighborhood is not the kind of suffering I'm talking about.

16. But when you're punished for being a Christian and for living a life of kindness and compassion, that's something I don't want you to feel sad about. You should be glad because that's how you know that people consider you a Christian.

17. The time has come when all who claim to be disciples will be tested to see how genuine their faith really is. If we experience pain and have to face persecutions and possibly a martyr's death, what will be the end of those who have rejected God's mercy?

18. As the Scriptures say, "If things are painful for good people who are being saved, what will it be like for the sinner when he realizes that he's lost?"

19. So those of you who are arrested and are suffering for your faith, remember that God is allowing this to happen. It's through your Christian conduct that He can say something to others about Himself, that in normal conditions He could not say. That's why you need to commit your lives to Him as your loving Creator and continue to do good. He won't forsake you, but in His own time He'll fulfill all the promises that He has made to you.

CHAPTER 5

1. **Now** I want to say a word to the church elders. I want you to know that what I'm telling you about Christ I saw with my own eyes! How much it hurt Him when they insulted Him the way they did, yet He never retaliated or became defensive. I know that if by His power I can live that way here on earth, when He comes, I'll be taken home to live with Him in heaven.

2. So I appeal to you to be the shepherds you ought to be, nourishing the flock that God has given to you and taking care of it the way God wants you to. Do it willingly and happily, not because you have to, but because you want to. Don't act as if you're working for wages, but work because you really want to serve and help others.

3. Don't lord it over those who have been put under your care, but be an example to them.

4. And when the Shepherd of shepherds comes back, He'll honor and crown each of you with glory, just as He was honored and crowned with glory when He went back to heaven. That honor will never fade away.

5. Now the young among us should have the same respect toward the elders as

the elders should have toward them. In fact, all of the members should act that way toward each other. They should be ready to serve and to do whatever needs to be done. As the Scriptures say, "God can't do much with proud people, but He does give grace to the humble."

6. So humble yourselves before God by fully depending on Him, no matter what the circumstances are, and in His own good time, He will lift you up.

7. Leave all your anxieties and worries with Him because He cares for you.

8. Stay alert and keep your eyes open because the devil seems to be roaming around like a hungry lion desperate to find someone he can stalk and kill.

9. So stand firm in your faith, and don't be afraid of the devil. You know that believers everywhere are going through the same severe trials that you are.

10. But the persecutions you're going through will last only for a little while. The God who invited you to become a follower of His Son, and to share Christ's glory, will stay with you to the very end. He will give you all the courage, strength, steadfastness, and hope that you'll need.

11. To Him be all the power and glory both now and forever. Amen.

12. I wrote this letter to you with the help of Silvanus, whom I consider to be a most dependable brother. My purpose was to encourage you and to tell you that what you're doing is right. Yours is the true fruit of God's grace, so stand firm in it.

13. The church here in Rome, which is also chosen and guided by God, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, who loves you and is like a son to me.

14. Give everyone a Christian hug for me. Peace be with all of you as my fellow believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

II PETER

CHAPTER 1

1. **This** letter is from Peter, a willing slave of Jesus Christ and His apostle. It is being sent to those who have received the same precious faith as we have, which is the good news about what God has done for us through our Savior Jesus Christ.

2. Grace and peace be yours a thousandfold, as it comes to you from a knowledge of God made possible through Jesus Christ.

3. God's divine power has given us everything we need to live a Christian life. He has even shared with us His own goodness and glory.

4. He has promised to do great things for us and to help us live above the destructive lust that's corrupting the world.

5. For this same reason, He has given you spiritual gifts to enable you to add to your belief a life of purity and virtue, a greater knowledge about God,

6. self-discipline, firm commitment, a Christlike attitude,

7. genuine human affection, and the selfless love of agape.

8. When these qualities overflow in your life, you'll never be an ineffective disciple, nor will your love for Jesus Christ diminish.

9. But the person who doesn't care to add these qualities to his basic faith in Christ is short-sighted, and has forgotten that Jesus Christ died to save him and to give him power to live above sin.

10. Therefore, brothers, be all the more zealous to confirm your calling and what God had in mind for you, and if you add these things to your basic faith in Christ, you'll never leave Him.

11. This combination of God's saving grace and His enabling power to which you're responding, will provide you with the full right to enter the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, where you will receive a rich welcome.

12. **Now** I intend to keep reminding you of these things so that you won't forget them as some have already done. But I'm glad that you're firmly rooted in the truth of Christ, which you so readily re-

ceived when we first brought it to you.

13. Yet, I think it's only right for me to stir up your memories and to help you recall those great experiences you had when you first met Christ. And I intend to keep on reminding you of them as long as I'm alive.

14. I'm saying this because I don't think I have much longer to live. I have a feeling that I'll soon be arrested and crucified just as the Lord Jesus Christ told me I would be.

15. So I want to do my best to put these thoughts in writing so you can refer to them again and again, and refresh your memories about what I have told you even after I'm gone.

16. I want you to know that we haven't depended on made-up stories to strengthen your faith when we told you about the life and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He comes again, you'll see for yourself the kind of power He has. We were given a glimpse of it and saw it with our own eyes.

17. We were with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration when He gave us a preview of His coming. He was briefly invested with the glory and power He had before. And the Father Himself spoke to us from heaven and said, "This is my own Son with whom I'm so very pleased. Listen to what He has to say."

18. Yes, we actually heard God's voice speaking to us from heaven! And all this happened right there on the mountain before our very eyes!

19. But we have something more sure than that, the writings of the ancient prophets. You will do well to pay attention to what they said, because their predictions are like a lamp shining in the darkness until the light of the morning floods the earth. Those writings will illumine your hearts until that day when Jesus Christ returns and you can see Him in all His glory as we did.

20. You need to remember that these ancient prophecies are not the inspired writer's personal opinion, nor do they reflect the conviction of the community. In fact, there is not one person or group of

persons who can write or explain a prophecy of Scripture on his own without the help of God.

21. These ancient writings are the product of the Holy Spirit, who revealed these thoughts to selected men and women, and then guided them as they used their own words in speaking and writing the message God gave them.

CHAPTER 2

1. **This** does not mean that there were no false prophets back then, or that no false teachers will come along today and tell you something different from what's plainly written in Scripture. You can expect false prophets and false teachers to come, and they'll bring in false doctrines and undermine everything I've told you. Some will even deny the divinity of the One who died for them. But when the day of judgment comes, they will quickly reap what they have sown.

2. In spite of this, many will be attracted by what these false teachers have to say, and even adopt their lifestyle. As a result of this deception, the gospel will be questioned and discredited as never before.

3. These kinds of teachers make up all sorts of stories to get people to follow them and support them. You can be sure that God is aware of what they're doing, and in His eyes it won't be long before they'll reap what they've sown, as I said before.

4. God couldn't even spare the angels who had sinned, but had to put them out of heaven. So it'll only be a matter of time before these false teachers will have to face what they have done.

5. You can see this same principle at work at the time of the flood. Just look at what happened to all the godless people back then. They weren't saved. The only people saved were Noah, that great teacher of right-doing, and the seven members of his family.

6. Take a look at what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. God knew what was happening then and did not ignore it. Evil became so rampant and entrenched in people's hearts that their actions were irreversible. The destruction of their cities is

an example of what will eventually happen to all those who are entrenched in godlessness.

7. But look at what God did for Lot, who was trying to live a good life. Hardly a day went by when he was not distressed by the immorality he saw all around him.

8. That good man didn't have a moment of peace, but suffered daily as he heard and saw man's inhumanity to man and all the other wickedness that way taking place.

9. From this you can see that the Lord knows what's going on, and that He will rescue His people. Also you can see that even though the wicked continue in their ways until they die, when the day of judgment comes, the Lord will not cover for them, but they'll have to face what they have done.

10. That day will be particularly hard on those who lived according to their own natures and followed their own desires, when all the time they knew what God expected of them. In fact, these are the people who are usually very defensive and arrogant when you try to correct them, and they seem to have little respect for the more sacred things in life. They don't really listen to what others have to say, and don't want anyone to tell them what to do.

11. In contrast, angels, who are much more intelligent than these false prophets and teachers, would never think of insulting and accusing anyone in the presence of God, not even the wicked.

12. But these people seem to live more by instinct than anything else. They act like irrational animals and attack anything they don't understand. Like wild beasts out of control, they ought to be captured and caged before they do any more harm, and as such, they will one day perish.

13. They will reap what they have sown and will have to pay for all the harm they have done; for them pleasure means to satisfy the cravings of the body. They're a disgrace to you at your potluck, and see the whole occasion as an opportunity to indulge themselves; and then they act as if nothing's wrong.

14. They go around looking all the women up and down thinking of nothing

but adultery. Their appetite for sin is never satisfied. They're always reaching out for more and think of no one else but themselves. Sad to say, the rest of the members are charmed by their flair and let them get away with almost anything.

15. These false prophets and teachers have left the path of truth they were once on and have lost their sense of direction. They're now like Balaam, who was so self-centered that he was ready to do anything to further his own interests.

16. God even used a donkey to rebuke him. The donkey spoke to Balaam with a human voice, and without thinking, Balaam answered back. This shows how insanely intent he was to benefit himself. Finally, he stopped beating the poor animal when God opened his eyes and he saw an angel standing in the way with the appearance of a sword in his hand.

17. These false prophets and teachers are also like dried-up springs of water, like clouds being blown in all kinds of directions by swirling winds. The darkness of total oblivion is their destiny.

18. They are always talking about how great they are and what rights they have. And they go around making general statements about things they really don't know anything about. They always want to get people involved with them in their lustful desires, especially new members who have recently been baptized and are trying hard not to fall back into sin.

19. They also promise these new members a more advanced freedom, one which gives them license to do almost anything without having to feel guilty, because they are told, they're now under grace and not under law. But these false brethren don't seem to realize that they're slaves to their own depravity, even though they go around telling others how free they are. They don't seem to understand that a man becomes a slave to anything that masters him.

20. If believers, who have freed themselves from slavery to sin by accepting Jesus Christ, again choose to return to the slavery of sin, such people are in worse condition than before.

21. In one way, it would be much bet-

ter had they never known Christ, than to accept Him as their personal Savior from sin and then forsake Him by going contrary to all they've been taught.

22. It's like the old proverb which says, "A dog goes back to lick what he has vomited," and in another place, "A pig that has been washed goes back to roll in the mud."

CHAPTER 3

1. My dear friends, this is now the second letter I've written to you. In both of them I've tried to stir up your minds to think as believers in Christ should, and I did this by reminding you of what I taught you before.

2. I don't want you to forget what the ancient prophets predicted, and what we as apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ told you we saw with our own eyes.

3. You need to understand that right up to the last days people will criticize what we believe, and scoffers will come making fun of us.

4. For instance, they'll make fun of Christ's return even though we had a glimpse of what His second coming will be like when He was transfigured before our very eyes. And they'll also say, "We've heard about His coming for years, and now our parents have died, and He still hasn't come. So things will go on as usual, as they always have."

5. But what these critics ignore is the fact that God's patient waiting will come to an end. When God created the earth and its atmosphere, He made it to stand out from a watery mist.

6. During the days of Noah, He used water to destroy what He had created, except the planet itself.

7. This shows that God is in control, and that He can do with this earth whatever He wants to do with it. It also shows that it's His power that's keeping this planet spinning in space and keeping the people on it alive. So you can be sure that what God did at the time of the flood, He can do again, only the next time He'll destroy everything with fire.

8. With God time is not a factor as it is with us. So time is no proof that God has

changed His mind, or that His power is not what it used to be. To Him one day or a thousand years are all the same.

9. This doesn't mean that the Lord is slow in keeping His promises, and that He needs a great length of time to carry them out. Nor does it mean that He does things only when He gets around to it. Time has gone on only because of God's patience and kindness, which is sometimes hard for us to understand. We're the ones who are impatient and wonder why God doesn't do something. But we fail to realize how much He loves everyone, even the wicked, and that He doesn't want anyone to be lost and lose out on heaven, but to turn from their sins and be saved.

10. The Lord will come, and He'll come as unexpectedly as a thief in the night. When He comes, the earth's atmosphere will disappear with a roll of the loudest thunder that man has ever heard. Heavenly planets will be moved out of their places, and everything on earth will be consumed by fire.

11. Since this will happen when people least expect it, what kind of lives do you think we ought to live? For this reason, if for no other, our lives should be wholly dedicated to God

12. as we look forward to the day of Christ's coming, and do our best to make it come soon. That's when the heavens will be on fire and the surface of the earth will melt because of the intense heat.

13. But in harmony with God's promise, we look beyond all this to a new heaven

and a new earth.

14. My dear friends, as you look forward to that day when Christ will come, do your best to live for Him. Make every effort to live blameless lives. Then, when He comes He will introduce you as His children to the whole universe.

15. Look at His delay as evidence of His great patience and love, and as an extended opportunity for others to repent of their sins and be saved. Paul also pointed this out in his writings, as some of you well know, by telling you what God had shown him.

16. He emphasizes the importance of holy living in all his letters. Now I realize that some things he says are hard to understand, and those who don't seem to have much common sense or who are emotionally unstable misinterpret what he says and then apply it wrongly. This is to be expected because they do the same thing with the rest of the Scriptures. Unfortunately, the road they're on will lead them to self-destruction.

17. Since you already know this, I don't need to say anything else. Just be on guard so you won't be misled by those who misunderstand and misapply the Scriptures, and end up losing your hold on God and fall from your secure position of faith.

18. I want you to continue to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be all the honor and the glory both now and forever. Amen.

I JOHN

CHAPTER 1

1. **The** One who always was, He is the Living Word of God, He is the One we heard speak with our own ears, the Word we saw with our own eyes, the Word whose every move we carefully watched, and the One our hands have actually handled.

2. This Living Word became audible and visible and we heard it and saw it ourselves, and this is the Word we want to tell you about, the Word that was with the Father and then with us.

3. We want to share with you what we've seen and heard so you can have fellowship with us and together we can have fellowship with the Father and with His Son.

4. We also want to share this with you because we want you to have the same joy and inner happiness that we have.

5. This is the message we received from Him, that God is light and life and not darkness and death.

6. If we say we have fellowship with Him and then act as if we don't know Him, we're living a lie.

7. But if we walk in God's light as Jesus Christ His Son walked in it, then we can have fellowship with each other, and the power of Jesus Christ in our lives will help us overcome our sinning.

8. If we say we've never sinned, or that by nature we're not sinners, we're deceiving ourselves and are not telling the truth.

9. However, if we're honest with ourselves and confess our sins to Him, He will be faithful and just to forgive us our sins and will cleanse us from all wrong-doing.

10. But if we insist that we never sinned, or that by nature we're not sinners, we're saying that God is a liar, or that He doesn't know what He's talking about. This shows that His word is not really in our hearts no matter what else we may say.

CHAPTER 2

1. You are my spiritual children, and I'm sharing these things with you so you'll stop sinning and come to the Lord. I want

you to know that, if any of you fall into sin, we have Someone to plead our case and to justify our acceptance before the universe. This Someone is Jesus Christ.

2. He is the One who covers our sins and the sins of anyone who accepts Him as his Savior and Lord.

3. **Now** one way to know if we know Him is if we're convicted to stop sinning and to live by to His commandments.

4. If anyone says he knows God and doesn't live by His commandments, he's a liar and the truth is not in him.

5. For as a person lives in harmony with God's law, the love of God will be perfected in him. This is the only way we can know whether we really know Him, if we love to obey Him.

6. If anyone says he has fellowship with God and loves Him, then He ought to do the things that God wants Him to do.

7. My brothers, I'm not telling you anything new nor am I giving you a new commandment. I'm just reminding you of an old commandment which has been around for a long time, actually from the very beginning. If you would stop to think, you'd recognize it, because you've heard me say it before.

8. Yet, in another sense, what I'm telling you is something exciting and new because we've now seen the Word Himself obey and keep His Father's commandments. He lived this love. We saw it working in His life, and now we see it working in you. So in this sense, loving God takes on new meaning, a new revelation of what love is all about. It's as if for the first time we've seen it in the light, whereas before we looked at it through the darkness.

9. Now if anyone says he's walking in the light of love and hates his brother, he's still walking in darkness and doesn't understand what love is all about.

10. On the other hand, anyone who loves his brother is walking in the light of love, and in the light there's no reason to stumble.

11. This means that the one who hates his brother is in darkness and stumbles

about in darkness. He doesn't know where he's going because the darkness has kept him from seeing the light.

12. I'm sharing this truth with you as I would with my own children. I want you to know that the sins you've confessed are really forgiven, and that this was done for Christ's sake as well as for your own.

13. Fathers, this message is for you. You've accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior and you know that He's God come in the flesh, and that He's existed from the very beginning. I'm also including you, young men, because you've already shown that through Jesus Christ you can be victorious over the evil one. And you little ones, you know in your hearts that your heavenly Father loves you.

14. I want to compliment you Fathers because you've accepted the Lord Jesus Christ, who existed from the beginning. I also want to compliment you young men because you are strong in the Lord, that is, the word of God abides in your hearts and by it you have overcome the evil one.

15. Don't fall in love with the world. If anyone does fall in love with the world, then the love of the Father is no longer in him.

16. For everything that is in the world--the cravings of our sinful human nature, the desires of our eyes, and the pride in our worldly possessions--are not from the Father, but from the world.

17. Now this world and everything in it will pass away. But those who are doing the will of God will never perish. They'll be given eternal life and live forever.

18. My dear children, this is Satan's last stand. I'm sure that you've heard about the prophecy that speaks of the coming of antichrist. A number of people with this kind of spirit are already at work. They deny the truth that Christ was God in the flesh. Such sentiments are gaining ground everywhere. That's how we know that this is the devil's frantic attempt to discredit God.

19. And these sentiments are being spread around by those who were once with us. But they were never really with us or they wouldn't have left us. Yet, they did leave us and that's how we know that

they were not one of us to begin with.

20. But you're still with us because you're still listening to the Holy Spirit, who brought you to Christ to begin with. And because you know Christ and love Him, that's why you're still with us.

21. The reason I'm writing to you this way is because I want you to know what's happening. You know the truth, so you'll be able to recognize error even when it's spoken of as truth.

22. The present error that's being circulated is that Jesus of Nazareth is not the divine Son of God, the promised Messiah. And the people who are saying this have such an antichrist spirit, that they're actually denying the truth about the Father as well.

23. Whoever denies that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God is denying the truth about the Father. And whoever accepts Jesus Christ as the Son of God, also accepts the truth about the Father.

24. So hold on to what we've told you about Jesus Christ from the first time we came and preached to you, and if you believe this with all your heart, you will always have fellowship with the Father as well as with the Son.

25. And in addition, you'll receive eternal life, which God the Father has promised to give you.

26. I'm pointing this out to you because I'm concerned that some of those who are preaching error will seduce you and rob you of your faith.

27. That doesn't mean that I don't have confidence in you, I do. I know that Christ through the Holy Spirit has been guiding you. That's why you have no need of anyone teaching you, as long as you depend on the Holy Spirit and listen to what He has to say.

28. Now, my children, keep up your fellowship with Jesus Christ and look forward with confidence to His coming. Let's not be ashamed to do this because that's what He told us to do when He promised He would come to take us home.

29. You know that Jesus Christ is righteous, and you know that everyone who does what is right is a genuine child of God.

CHAPTER 3

1. **Just** stop to think of the kind of love that the Father must have for us to accept us as His sons and daughters, and this is why the world does not accept us. It is because it hasn't accepted Him.

2. Dear believers, without a doubt we're God's sons and daughters. Although our bodies don't look like it, we know that when Christ comes back, we'll be changed to look like Him. And then we'll see Him as God in the flesh, which He is.

3. Now everyone who centers his hope in Christ and looks forward to His return will purify himself as He is pure.

4. Everyone who sins is a lawbreaker because sin is the breaking of the law. And at its core, sin is rebellion both against God and against His law.

5. As you know, Christ came to die for our sins, not His own sins. He had no sin.

6. Everyone who's in Christ doesn't continue sinning, and those who keep on sinning don't really know Christ.

7. Dear children, don't let anyone fool you. The person who is right with God does what is right, just as Christ did what was right.

8. But the person who keeps on sinning is being influenced by the devil, not by Christ. The devil has been sinning from the beginning, and he's the father of all sinning. That's why Christ came, to break the devil's power, and his hold on people.

9. So anyone who has been born again by the power of God will not continue to sin because he has been transformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. He doesn't keep on sinning because it's not consistent with his new nature.

10. This is the basic difference between the children of God and the children of the devil. Those who don't do what is right, and don't love and care about their brothers and sisters in Christ, don't really belong to God.

11. The message that's been given to you and that you've heard from the beginning is still the same, that you should love one another.

12. Let's not be like Cain, who was so influenced by the wicked one that he ended up killing his own brother. And why did

he kill him? He killed him because Abel did what was right in God's sight, and he didn't.

13. So don't be surprised if those who don't know God hate you and will be influenced by the wicked one to kill you.

14. One way we know that we know God and will be given eternal life is that we love and care about each other. Those who don't love their brothers and sisters in the faith will not inherit eternal life, and death still hangs over them.

15. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer. We know that a person who's ready to kill his brother will not be given eternal life.

16. We know how much God loved us because He sent His own Son to die for us. So we ought to be willing to die for our brothers and sisters.

17. And this kind of love begins by doing something for our brothers and sisters when they need us. So when those of you who have possessions see a brother in need, but you don't help him, how can you say that you love God and that He's put His love in you?

18. My dear children, to love someone doesn't mean just feeling good toward them. It means helping them, whether we feel good toward them or not.

19. This is how we know whether we've been reborn and really have God's truth in our hearts. This inner compulsion to love and serve is evidence that we belong to God.

20. So when our conscience condemns us, let's listen, but let's also remember that God knows more than our conscience.

21. And if our conscience does not condemn us, we can come with that much more confidence before God to present our petition to Him.

22. We can ask Him for whatever we need in order to live for Him, and he will give it to us because we obey Him and want to please Him.

23. Now the sum of the whole gospel is that we should accept what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us, and then love one another as He loved us.

24. The person who lives by God's law of love is living out Christ's spirit within

him. That's how we know that God is living in us, by the kind of actions we're prompted to do.

CHAPTER 4

1. My dear children, be careful, don't believe everything you hear. But test what you hear to see if it's really from God or not because a lot of false preachers are roaming the earth.

2. One way to test those who claim to be preachers of truth and to know whether or not their message is from the Holy Spirit, is to ask them if they believe that Jesus Christ the Son of God became a man.

3. Anyone who does not believe that Christ came in the flesh is not of God and has the spirit of antichrist. You knew this would happen, and it's already happening.

4. But you, my children, belong to God and you've overcome the temptation to listen to these false preachers, because the One who lives in you is stronger than the one who's in them and who's trying to get at you. He's the one who's trying to control the whole world.

5. These false preachers and teachers are guided by what the world says and by the way the world thinks. That's why they don't hesitate to speak the way they do. And those people who respond to them, do so because they, too, are guided by what the world says and thinks.

6. However, we belong to God because we're guided by what He says. People who listen to what we have to say about Christ respond because they're in tune with God already, while those who don't respond are not in tune with God to begin with. By staying in tune with what God has said, we are able to tell the difference between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

7. Beloved, let's love one another just as God loves, and such love can only come from Him. That's how you know whether or not you've been born again and whether or not you know God.

8. Anyone who doesn't reflect this kind of love doesn't really know God, because God is a God of love.

9. The kind of love we're talking about

is the kind of love that God has for us, and this is seen in His gracious act of sending His only begotten Son to this world that we might have eternal life.

10. It's by looking at the cross that we really see what love is all about. It's God's gracious act of sending His Son to take our place and to die for our sins.

11. If God so loved us, then we should love each other the same way.

12. Not one of us can say that we've ever met God personally. But if this kind of love remains in us, then God has implanted it there and we reflect it to others.

13. And this is how we know we still have a personal relationship with God, and He with us, because He has given us His love.

14. So now we can say that we've actually met God and know what He's like. And we can point others to the evidence within us that the Father loved us, and that He sent His Son to die not only for us, but for the whole world.

15. Whoever acknowledges that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the divine Son of God, and by his actions shows that he has God's love in him, then God is truly living in him and we know that he knows God.

16. We know that God is love and that this love is directed at us. And anyone who loves God will keep up his relationship with Him, and God will continue to be with him.

17. This kind of love for God shows its maturity when it gives us confidence to face the day of judgment without being afraid. And just as Christ came into this world and faced its problems and continued to love God, we can do the same.

18. Fear and love just don't go together. Love that is mature gets rid of fear because fear focuses on punishment and won't let love grow as it should. The one who fears has not understood the depth of God's love.

19. We can love God and love others because He first loved us. That's where our love comes from.

20. If someone says, "I love God with all my heart," and then turns around and hates his brother, he's a liar. A person

who can't love his brother whom he sees every day, how can he say he loves the One he's never seen? His love for God is made real by loving someone he can see.

21. This is what Christ is asking us to do. So whoever loves God and appreciates what He has done for him will love his brother also.

CHAPTER 5

1. Everyone who believes that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah has been born of God. And everyone who loves Jesus will also love those who have become children of God through Him.

2. And we know that we will continue to love the children of God, because we love God and are committed to keeping His commandments.

3. Loving God means keeping His commandments, and to live according to His commandments is not as hard as some people say it is.

4. Anyone who's been born again can overcome the world. And what gives us victory over the world is our faith in God.

5. Who can overcome the world? Anyone who believes that Jesus Christ is God's Son and goes to Him for help.

6. Jesus, the divine Son of God, was baptized for us and shed His blood for us. He lived for us and died for us. The Holy Spirit has given us sufficient evidence to know that this is true, and the Holy Spirit does not lie.

7. In fact, there are Three heavenly Witnesses who testify to what happened. In heaven it is the Father, on earth it was Jesus Christ, and since then it has been the fullness of the Holy Spirit. All Three speak with one voice.

8. Also there are three earthly events which testify to this. It is Christ's baptism, Christ's death, and the preaching of Christ through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. These three events are saying one and the same thing about Christ.

9. Now if we accept the testimony of two or three men as confirmation of a thing and legally binding, why don't we accept the testimony of God? God's testimony is infinitely more reliable than man's testimony is, and He's already told us who

His Son is.

10. And he who believes God, and that Jesus Christ is His Son, has an additional testimony within himself because he's been reborn. Now the one who doesn't believe what God said about Christ, is saying that God is a liar. He's never accepted God's testimony about His own Son.

11. But we believe what God said, and we have God's testimony within us, that is, He has changed us and already given us a foretaste of eternal life. And this life is to be found only in His Son.

12. So, clearly, anyone who accepts God's testimony and believes in the Son of God has eternal life, and anyone who does not accept God's testimony or does not believe in the Son of God, does not have eternal life.

13. I want to point these truths out to those of you who believe in God's Son and have been born again, so you can be assured and know that the change within you is the beginning of eternal life. As soon as you acknowledged Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and accepted Him as your Lord and Savior, you were given eternal life.

14. And the freedom we now feel is that if we can ask Him for anything, and He will not only listen, but will answer our prayers and do whatever is best for us.

15. We know He doesn't turn a deaf ear to us, and whatever we ask for, we know that He will answer according to His love.

16. Now if any one should see a brother sinning in ignorance, he should pray for him, knowing that God will forgive him and give him eternal life, if he did sin in ignorance. But you can scarcely ask God to give eternal life to a man who is deliberately sinning.

17. Now, all wrong-doing is sin, but all sins are not equal because God looks at the motive and the knowledge a person has of what is right.

18. However, we know that anyone born of God does not deliberately keep on sinning. But Christ, who is the Son of God, claims him and the wicked one has no power over him.

19. We know we belong to God and that the world belongs to the wicked one.

20. We know that the Son of God has come so that we might know the truth. And we are in the truth because we know God's Son, who is none other than Jesus

Christ. And it's through God's Son that we've been given eternal life.

21. So keep away from false gods and from false teachings about God. Amen.

II JOHN

1. **This** letter is from John, the elder, sent to the dear lady whom I admire as a firm believer in the truth and to her dear children. I'm not the only one who admires your commitment to Christ, but all who love the truth love you and admire you.

2. This love and mutual spiritual bonding exists among us because we love the truth, and by the grace of God, the truth is in us to stay.

3. May the grace, mercy, and peace that can come only from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, who is God's dear Son, be truly yours.

4. I was really happy when I heard that your children had accepted the truth and are now living just as our heavenly Father told us we should live.

5. My dear lady, as Christians we should continue to love one another. This is not something new, but rather something that I've talked to you about before. And be kind and loving to everyone you meet, just as you want people to be kind and loving to you.

6. This love will also lead us to obey God and keep His commandments. These commandments we've known from the beginning, and they are all based on one commandment, that we should love God and love one another.

7. The other thing I need to talk to you about is that some believers now think that Jesus Christ was not a human being. And those who preach this are doing the work of antichrist.

8. Be careful that you don't lose the truth that you've worked so hard for and that has already given you a taste of eternal life. You will certainly receive your full reward when the Lord returns.

9. Anyone who does not preach the truth about Jesus Christ as we taught it, is not sent from God, no matter what else he says. Anyone who does preach the truth about Jesus Christ knows both the Father and the Son.

10. If anyone wants to stay at your house who doesn't preach the truth, don't take him in. In fact, don't even say to him, "May God bless you in your preaching."

11. If you do, you're telling him that you approve of what he's saying, and in that sense, you become an accomplice with him in his wickedness.

12. There are many other things I would like to warn you about, but I would rather not put them in writing. I prefer talking to you about them the next time I come to see you. That'll also give us an opportunity to share our mutual faith and love of the truth.

13. Your sister's children send their greetings. Amen.

III JOHN

1. This letter is from John, the elder, sent to Gaius, whom I truly love in the truth.

2. My dear friend, above everything else I want things to go well with you. I want you to be as healthy spiritually as you are physically.

3. I was really happy when some of the members stopped by to see me and told me how you love the truth and how faithful you are. This is just like you.

4. Nothing can make me happier than to hear that my children in Christ are loyal to the truth and living in harmony with it.

5. My dear friend, you are sincere and faithful in everything; you do things for believers and strangers alike.

6. Many people have spoken to us in our church about your loving care for them. And do help those travel-weary preachers who come your way. Be kind to them, and after their stay there, send them on their way feeling good.

7. They have set out on their mission in the name of Christ, but have not been well received by unbelievers.

8. We must help these men and be hospitable to them lest they become discouraged and we lose them from the work of the gospel.

9. I want you to know that I have written a letter to the church there, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the final word, has paid no attention to what I've said.

10. So I've decided to come myself as soon as I can, and when I do, I won't forget what he did and what malicious lies he's been spreading about us. I can assure you that I'm not going to put up with that sort of thing. He's the kind of fellow who never opens his home to any of the travel-weary preachers who come to visit. And when others take them home, he accuses them of harboring fugitives and then threatens to put them out of the church for it.

11. My dear friend, don't let him tell you what to do, but you do what's right, no matter what Diotrephes says. Anyone who does what is right belongs to God, and anyone who doesn't do what's right doesn't belong to God. It's just that simple.

12. Now Demetrius, whom I'm sending to you, has a good reputation everywhere he goes, and the believers appreciate his stand for the truth. I want to confirm what you've heard about him, and you know that I'm always up front with you and tell you the truth.

13. There are many other things I'd like to tell you, but I would rather not put them in writing.

14. Anyway, I hope to see you soon. Then we can visit together and talk about some of the other things that are on my heart. Peace be to you. Our dear friends here send you their greetings. Give our personal greetings to all our friends there. Amen.

JUDE

1. **This** letter is from Jude, a willing servant of Jesus Christ, and a stepbrother of the Lord together with James, who's now guiding the church from Jerusalem. It is being sent to those who are set apart by God the Father, kept spiritually safe by Jesus Christ, and called to serve by the Holy Spirit.

2. May God's mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you.

3. Beloved believers, the reason I'm so eager to write you is that I sense you need encouragement to defend yourselves against those who are challenging your faith. I decided to clarify some things for you about God's plan of salvation which we brought to you and which made you into a special people.

4. Certain men have attached themselves to your church group, who by their very nature cause nothing but trouble. You need to be made aware of them because sooner or later they'll challenge what you believe. These are the kind who turn the graciousness of God into permissiveness, and in doing so deny God's plan of salvation and the sacrifice made for us by the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. I want to remind you again, even though I've mentioned this to you before, and which you already know, that though God saved the Israelites and brought them out of Egypt, He didn't hesitate to step in and take away the life of those who were rebellious.

6. Going back in time, angels also rebelled against God. So God had to take action and expel them from heaven, and now they're kept from roaming throughout the universe and are confined to this world until the day of judgment when they will be destroyed.

7. Look at what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities. These cities had become so intoxicated with sex, and with such unnatural practices as homosexuality and sodomy, that their destruction is a good example of what will happen to those who insist on living that way.

8. These kind of ungodly men have

attached themselves to your congregation and are living filthy lives. They hate any kind of restraint, and don't want anyone to tell them what to do. They won't hesitate to attack anyone and accuse them of any thing just to get the attention off themselves.

9. In stark contrast to these ungodly men is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is also called Michael the Archangel, because He's in charge of the entire angelic host. Now when He was challenged by Satan about His intentions to resurrect Moses, He didn't come at Satan with a blistering attack. He just quietly said, "The Lord God rejects your claim to his body."

10. But these men are so opinionated that they don't hesitate to downgrade anything they don't understand, and attack whoever in their judgment is wrong. They follow their instinct just like animals, and in doing so, they're letting everyone know the kind of people they really are.

11. The future holds nothing for them but condemnation. Their attitude is like that of Cain. Their motives are like those of Balaam. The same rebellion is in their hearts as was in the heart of Korah, and they'll have to be destroyed just like he was.

12. These men come to your fellowship dinners and sit down to eat with you as though nothing is the matter. They make themselves look like clouds full of welcome showers, but they're empty clouds carried along by the wind. They're like fruitless trees at harvest time, dried up at the roots, twice dead.

13. They're like foaming waves that wash nothing but dirt up on a clean beach. They're like aimless stars going nowhere, only to disappear into the darkness of the distant universe.

14. Enoch, the seventh descendant in line from Adam, prophesied about such men when he said, "Listen, I saw in vision the Lord coming to earth with ten thousand angels.

15. He's coming to sit as judge to carry out the sentence that was agreed on by His people. He will convict the ungodly of all

their ungodliness, their immorality, their arrogance, and all they have said and done against Him.”

16. You can tell the kinds of people these men are. They’re constantly complaining, always grumbling and finding fault, doing their own thing no matter what, and going around being nice to people from whom they want something.

17. **Dear** friends, remember what the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ told you.

18. They said that scoffers would come into the church, who would follow their own godless desires, and that such would continue to be part of the church until Christ comes back.

19. And that’s what you see happening. The problem is that these kinds of people bring divisions into the church because they’re guided by nothing but their own desires and not by the Holy Spirit.

20. But you, my dear friends, keep building your faith, asking the Holy Spirit

to help you.

21. Keep yourselves in the love of God as you look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who in His love and mercy will joyfully give you eternal life.

22. And show this same love and mercy toward others, especially to those who have doubts about who the Lord Jesus Christ really is.

23. Help the lost as if they were caught in a fire, and rescue those who are trapped in a life of evil. Be kind and merciful to all of them, treating them with respect, but hating the sins that stick to their bodies like soiled garments.

24. Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling, who will one day introduce each one of you to the Father and then present you flawless before the assembled universe with great joy,

25. to such a God and Savior be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

REVELATION

CHAPTER 1

1. **This** book is a revelation of future events sent to us by God through Jesus Christ. Then Christ sent His angel to reveal it to His servant John.

2. And John wrote down all the things he saw and heard just as they were given to him. Thus, this book is the word from God and tells us the things that Jesus Christ wants us to know.

3. Blessed are those who read this book of prophecy to the church; blessed are those who listen; and blessed are those who do what it says, especially at the time of the end.

4. Greetings from me, John, to the seven congregations in Asia Minor, which have been selected by Jesus to receive the following letters. Grace to each of you and peace from God our Father, who is, who was, and who's coming to take us home. Grace to each of you and peace from the Holy Spirit, whose throne is next to the Father's.

5. Grace and peace to you from Jesus Christ, God's first and only born Son, who was the Father's trustworthy witness while on earth. He was the One who was raised from the dead, and who now in human form is over all the kings and rulers in the world. He is the One who loves us, and by dying for us has freed us from our sins and from the power of demonic forces, by His blood.

6. He is the One who has formed a new kingdom and made us priests to mediate the good news of salvation to the whole world. Therefore, to Jesus Christ be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

7. Just think, one day He'll be coming back riding on the clouds of heaven, and everyone will be able to see Him, even those who crucified Him, just as He promised them they would. This will be a painful experience for all who have rejected Him, no matter where they live or what their race or nationality. So let it be.

8. When the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to me, He said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the One who was and is and ever will be. I am the One who will

come. I am the Almighty One."

9. As you know, I'm John the apostle. I'm your brother in Christ and a fellow sufferer, because with you I believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and in the coming kingdom of God. I was exiled to this rocky island called Patmos for preaching the word of God, and for sharing with people the good news about Jesus Christ and the truth that He gave me.

10. On Sabbath morning after I had gone off to the edge of the island to be alone, and was quietly sitting there looking out at the sea and worshipping, I suddenly heard a voice behind me that sounded as loud as a trumpet.

11. The voice said to me, "Write in the book what I'm going to show you and send it to seven churches in Asia Minor. These are the churches in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."

12. As frightened as I was, I turned to see who was talking to me and I saw seven golden lampstands,

13. and someone like the Son of Man was walking among them. He was wearing a long, white robe down to His ankles, and He had a golden sash around His waist.

14. His hair was white like wool or even whiter, more like snow, and His eyes blazed like flames of fire.

15. His feet looked like glowing bronze. When He spoke, His voice sounded like the thundering waters of a mighty waterfall.

16. He was holding in the open palm of His right hand seven tiny stars. Each time He spoke, a beam of light, which looked like a two-edged sword, came out of His mouth. His whole face radiated with light as dazzling as the noonday sun.

17. When I saw this, I fell down as dead. He came close to me, put His hand on me, and said, "Don't be afraid. I am the First and the Last.

18. I was dead, but I'm alive, and I will never die again. All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth. I have full power over death and the grave.

19. Write down all the things I will show you. This includes things that are happening now and that will happen in the future.

20. The seven tiny stars that you saw in my hand and the seven golden lampstands are symbols. The seven tiny stars represent the seven pastors, who are messengers and speak for me to the seven churches. And the seven golden lampstands represent the seven congregations which they pastor."

CHAPTER 2

1. "To the pastor of the church in the city of Ephesus write the following letter: This is a message from the One who holds you in the palm of His hand. Your congregation has been chosen to symbolize the first period of the history of the church, but it also has lessons for my people individually until the end of time.

2. I know everything that you and your people in Ephesus have tried to do for me. I know the effort you've put forth and that you would rather die than be disloyal to me. I admire how you abhor wickedness and have the courage to test people who come along claiming to be sent by me when I never sent them. I also admire the careful work you do in exposing their lies.

3. You've taken much abuse because of me, but you did not give up. Through all the persecution you went through, you were as loyal to me as you could be.

4. However, I do have something to say to you. You don't love me as you used to. You're more concerned with the work of the church than you are with me.

5. Reflect on your past experience and you will see how your love for me has changed. You need to change. Once again you need to do the things you do for me for the right reason. If you don't change, I will no longer come to be with you, not because I don't love you, but because I'm no longer first in your life. Also, I will have to remove your lampstand from its honored place and your light will go out.

6. But you have one thing in your favor—you can't stand what the Nicolaitans are doing to the gospel. They are abusing

their God-given liberty and are teaching that obedience is not important. I also strongly dislike what they're doing.

7. If you have ears to hear, then you and your congregation need to listen to what the Holy Spirit has been trying to tell you. To those who listen and change their ways, I will give the right to eat the fruit of the Tree of Life, which was once in the Garden of Eden, but is now in heaven in the Garden of God.

8. To the pastor of the church in the city of Smyrna write this letter: This is a message from the One who is the beginning and the end, who died and is now alive, who knows your congregation better than you know it yourself. What is happening to your church is typical of what will happen to my people during the second period of the history of the church, and even to some of them individually, up to the end of time.

9. I know all the suffering you've gone through, and how you've lost everything and been reduced to poverty because of me. Yet this experience has made you rich, and no one can take these riches away from you because they're kept for you in heaven. I know all about the false accusations that some of those who claim to be the sons of Abraham have brought against you, but they're not really sons of Abraham, even though they say they are, because they don't have the same relationship with God that he had. They belong to those who belong to Satan.

10. So don't be afraid of what will happen to you. Satan is about to have some of you thrown into prison and this will test your faith as never before. And in the near future, there will be a time of severe persecution that will be extremely hard on you and it will last for ten days, each day standing for one year. But be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of eternal life.

11. If you have ears to hear, then you and your congregation need to listen to what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell you.

12. To the pastor of the church in the city of Pergamum send the following letter: This message is from the One who, when He speaks, has a stream of light

coming out of His mouth which looks like a sharp, two-edged sword. This message is not only for your congregation, but for my people who will be living during the third period of the history of the church, and is also helpful for individual believers to the end of time.

13. I know you're living in a town which Satan largely controls and which he uses as a base of operation. I know exactly what you're going through. I know all about your loyalty to me and the difficult circumstances that you're under. I know how you've held on to your faith in me even during times of intense persecution. This was when they executed my loyal disciple Antipas, and others like him, who gave their lives for me in the very city that Satan thought he controlled.

14. I need to point out a few things to you, and to my people, who later will be living during a time similar to yours. Some who worship with you are making the same compromise suggestions that Balaam made when he told Balak to entice the children of Israel by inviting them to have sexual relations with his people as a sign of unity.

15. And you have others in your congregation who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, who say that it doesn't matter what you do as long as you believe.

16. You need to repent and change your ways or I will come and war against you with the sword of my mouth.

17. If you have ears to hear, then you need to listen to what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell you. Those of you who overcome, I will feed with manna from the heavenly Sanctuary. I will also give you a new name and engrave it on a white stone. It will be a special name between us, and no one will know it except you and me.

18. To the pastor of the church in the city of Thyatira send this letter: This is a message from the Son of God whose eyes blaze like flames of fire and whose feet look like glowing bronze. It's a message for you, as well as for my people who will be living during the fourth period of the history of the church covering centuries of spiritual darkness, and is also helpful for believers who at any time face similar situations.

ations.

19. I know all about you. I know how much you love me. I know your activities, your faithfulness, your steadfastness, and your willingness to serve. I also know that you'll make more spiritual progress in your later years than you did in the beginning.

20. I need to point out some things to you. Unfortunately, you tolerate people like Jezebel, who called herself a prophetess and led the children of Israel into sexual immorality and into all kinds of gross behavior, including the worship of Baal. Similar activities have been going on among you.

21. I have given such people time to repent, but they refuse to change their ways.

22. I will leave them alone and let them continue to live like Jezebel, who loved to lie on her bed with her lovers. But they will have to suffer the consequences, unless they do repent of their spiritual adulteries by changing their ways.

23. Those who continue to behave like Jezebel will be given over to the sword and I will not protect them. My people will finally see that I am the One who knows everything, everyone's thoughts and motives, and I will reward each one for what he has done.

24. But those of you who belong to the Thyatira church and have not given in to Satan's spiritual allurements, I will not ask you to do anything else just now, except to stay faithful.

25. So hold on to what you believe and stand for your faith until I come back.

26. I will give to those of you in Thyatira and to my people everywhere, who have held to their faith and continued to walk in the light of truth, the same authority over nations and peoples that my Father has given to me.

27. When I return, my people will be given a voice in the destiny of nations. I will come with an iron scepter to smash the arrogance of this world as a man smashes a clay pot.

28. But each of you will stand out as brilliantly as the morning star.

29. If you have ears to hear, then listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you."

CHAPTER 3

1. "To the pastor of the church in the city of Sardis send the following letter: This message is from the One who with the Holy Spirit of God is holding the seven stars. This message is for you and your members, for my people living during the fifth period of the history of the church, and it will also help individual believers living at other times. I know what you did for me, and that you're dedicated reformers, but the momentum of your reformation has died out.

2. You should wake up and strengthen the little zeal you have left before it completely dies. What you started was good, but in God's sight your actions are a long way from being what they should be.

3. Remember what you learned during the times of reformation and how you responded when you saw the truth of the gospel being uncovered. You've been slipping, and you need to change your ways or you'll lose your hold on what you have. If you're not careful, I will come when you least expect it, like a thief in the night, and catch you unawares.

4. In your church there are a few who have kept their robes clean, and they will walk beside me dressed in white, for they are worthy.

5. Those who overcome will not only be dressed in white, but their names will never be removed from the Book of Life. And I will introduce each of them to the Father and present them to the universe as the ones who overcame.

6. So if you have ears to hear, then you need to listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you.

7. To the pastor of the church in the city of Philadelphia send the following letter: This message is from the One who is holy and true, the One who has been given the key of David. When He opens a door, no one can shut it, and when he shuts it, no one can open it. This message applies to you, to those of my people living during the sixth period of the history of the church, and it will also be helpful to individual believers everywhere up to the end of time.

8. I know what you're attempting to

do and how little power you have to change things. But you have held to the teachings of the Scriptures, and have been fiercely loyal to me, and have not denied my name.

9. Listen carefully. Some who are worshiping with you are being influenced and controlled by Satan. They claim they're true believers and, therefore, true Israelites, but they're not. Someday I will make them come and bow at your feet. Then they will know that I love you.

10. Since you have kept my commandments and endured all kinds of criticism because of me, I will keep you safe during the time of trouble that will come on the whole world to test all who live on the earth.

11. I want to say to those living at that time not to get discouraged, because I will come to save them. Hold on to what you have, and don't let anyone rob you of your faith. I don't want you to lose out on the crown of life.

12. He who is victorious will be a living pillar in the house of my God forever. I will inscribe on his heart the name of my God, the name of the royal city of my God, which is the new Jerusalem, and my own new name.

13. If you have ears to hear, then you need to listen to what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell you.

14. Finally, to the pastor of the church in the city of Laodicea send the following letter: This is a message from Him whose word is final, who is faithful and true, and who is in charge of God's creation. This message is for you and your congregation, for my people living during the final period of the history of the church, and is helpful to believers who at any time need this counsel.

15. I know what you have done for me, but I also know that you're neither for me nor against me. In other words, you're neither cold nor hot. I wish you were one or the other because the way you are now only confuses people.

16. Your relationship with me is so lukewarm, I will have to spit you out of my mouth.

17. You keep saying to yourself, "I'm blest with spiritual riches. The Lord has

prospered me, so I don't really need anything." But you don't know how spiritually wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked you really are.

18. Let me give you some advice. You need to come to me for faith, the kind that's like gold that has been refined in a furnace and proven to be true, the kind that will endure misunderstandings, rejections, and even persecutions. You need to come to me for a white robe that can cover your nakedness and shame, and the robe that I'm offering to you is made from my righteousness and not from yours. And you need to come to me for the Holy Spirit, whose presence is like eyesalve, so you can see and understand the things of God. It will cost you to follow me and be my disciple, but this is what you need to do.

19. Those I love, I discipline. That's why I'm reprimanding you and rebuking your arrogance. I want you to make an earnest effort to repent and do what's right.

20. To those living in the end, I want to say that my coming is very near. So I'm standing at your heart's door, knocking for you to let me in. Anyone who hears my voice and opens the door will be made glad, for I will come in and sit down with him and eat with him and he with me.

21. He who overcomes and wins the victory I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I won the victory for him and then sat down with my Father on His throne.

22. If you have ears to hear, then you had better listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you."

CHAPTER 4

1. After Jesus finished speaking, He disappeared from sight. I looked up to see where He might have gone, and when I did, I saw a huge hole in the sky. It looked like an opening into heaven. And I heard a voice coming from that opening that sounded as loud as a trumpet, and very much like the voice of Jesus that I had heard a little while before. It said, "Come up, and I will show you what must still happen."

2. Immediately the Holy Spirit took

control of me and took me up through this opening into heaven. There I saw a throne, and Someone was sitting on it. Then I realized it was God.

3. His face was too radiant for me to see, and His throne was bathed in light and looked as if it was made out of precious stones such as jasper and carnelian. A rainbow was over His throne and glistened as brightly as an emerald in the sun.

4. In a semicircle in front of His throne I saw twenty-four smaller thrones on which sat twenty-four elders, dressed in white and wearing crowns of gold.

5. And from the throne came flashes of lightning, and voices, and peals of thunder. I also saw in front of the throne, seven brightly burning torches, which I was told symbolized the presence of the Holy Spirit.

6. The floor of the throne room looked as big as an ocean, and like it was made of glass, clear as crystal. Close to the throne were four living beings with eyes that seemed to look everywhere, and alert to everything that was going on.

7. The first being looked as kingly as a lion, the second looked as strong as an ox, the third looked like an ordinary human, and the fourth looked as keen-eyed as an eagle.

8. Each one of these living beings had six huge wings. And when I looked at the wings, even they had markings that looked like eyes. The beings had nothing but praise on their lips for God, and they would sing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who ever was, who is, and who ever will be."

9. These beings directed their songs of honor and thanksgiving to the One sitting on the throne.

10. Then I saw the twenty-four elders fall on their knees before the throne and worship the One who lives forever and ever, and they took off their crowns and laid them at His feet.

11. They sang, "O Lord our God, you are worthy to receive all glory and honor and power because you are the One who created all things. By your own choice you created them and by your own power they continue to exist."

CHAPTER 5

1. I also saw a tightly rolled scroll in the hand of Him who sat on the throne. It had writings on both sides and was sealed with seven wax seals.

2. Then I saw a powerful angel appear and call out in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to take the scroll out of the hand of Him who is seated on the throne, and to break open these seven seals?"

3. No one was found in heaven or on the earth, either dead or alive, who was worthy to take the scroll out of the hand of God, break the seals, and read what was written on the scroll.

4. I was so hurt that I started to cry, because no one was found worthy to take the scroll.

5. Then one of the elders said to me, "Don't cry. Look! The Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Strength and Heir of David, He is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals."

6. I looked, and I saw a lamb standing in front of the One who sat on the throne and in front of the four living beings. It stood in the middle of the semicircle made up of the twenty-four elders. The lamb was covered with blood as though it had been sacrificed, yet it was alive! As I looked more closely, I noticed that it had seven tiny horns and seven eyes, which I was told represented the power of the Spirit, and the lamb represented Jesus the Lamb of God.

7. Then I saw the Lamb go up to the One sitting on the throne and took from Him the scroll that He was holding in His right hand.

8. And when the Lamb took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell on their knees and worshiped the Lamb. The twenty-four elders had small golden jars in their hands, which they then opened up, filling the air with perfume that I was told represented the prayers of God's people.

9. Then the twenty-four elders stood up, picked up their harps, and sang praise to the Lamb, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to break the seals. You were crucified for our sins and brought us back to God. You redeemed us by your

blood out of every nation, tribe, language, people, and race.

10. You have made us into a kingdom of priests to serve God and to help Him govern the universe."

11. Suddenly, I heard what seemed like the voices of a hundred billion angels join in the chorus of this new song that had been inspired by the Lamb.

12. The song swelled into an overwhelming crescendo as they sang, "The Lamb who was killed is worthy. All power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and praise belong to Him."

13. Then voices seemed to come from every part of creation, in heaven, on earth, within the earth and in the sea to join in the last great shout of praise, saying, "To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise, and honor, and glory, and power, forever and ever. Amen!"

14. And the four living beings shouted, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders slipped worshipfully to their knees.

CHAPTER 6

1. After the chorus ended, I saw the Lamb holding the scroll in His right hand, and He broke the first seal. As He did this, I heard the first of the four living beings say to me in a voice that sounded like a distant roar of thunder, "Come! Look! See the controversy between Christ and Satan over the giving of the Gospel!"

2. I looked to where he was pointing and saw a galloping white horse, and the rider on it had a bow in his hand and arrows strapped to his back. He was wearing the crown of a king. He galloped into the future to spread the gospel and to conquer the world for God. This was the first period of the gospel's controversy with the world.

3. Then the Lamb broke the second seal, and the second living being said to me in a voice that sounded like distant thunder, "Come! Look!"

4. I looked and saw a red horse galloping into the future. Its rider had a sword in his hand. He had no intention of bringing peace to this world by compromise, but rather to do battle for the Lord. As a result, I saw people killed, family mem-

bers turning against each other, and the conflict seemed to spread farther and farther. This was the second period of the gospel's controversy with the world.

5. Then the Lamb broke the third seal. And I heard the third living being speak to me in a voice that sounded like distant thunder and say, "Come! Look!" I looked and saw a black horse galloping into the future. Its rider was holding the scales of death.

6. As I was trying to figure out the meaning of this, I heard a voice from the throne speak to me and say, "Harvesting the wheat, the barley, and the grapes is costly because they're so scarce. The weeds are plentiful, but they will not be able to choke out the good seed and prevent God from having a harvest of grapes and oil." This was the third period of the gospel's controversy with the world.

7. Then the Lamb broke the fourth seal. And the last of the four living beings spoke to me in a voice that sounded like distant thunder and said, "Come! Look!"

8. I looked and saw a pale-colored horse also galloping into the future. Its rider seemed to bring with him nothing but death. As he rode by, I saw thousands of tombstones pop up in the tracks of his horse's hoofs. Death seemed to be everywhere, covering almost one-fourth of the earth, and death came from persecution, starvation, exposure, disease, and torture from man's fellow men. This was the fourth period of the gospel's controversy with the world.

9. Next the Lamb broke the fifth seal. As I looked, I could make out an altar, and under the altar were human bones representing those who had died for the Lord. They had faithfully proclaimed God's word and were killed because of their faith.

10. They seemed to be crying for justice, saying, "Almighty God, we know that you are faithful and true, but how much longer do we have to wait before you will judge those who murdered us just because we loved you?"

11. A voice said, "White robes of victory have already been set aside for each of you, but you have to wait a little longer, because until the enemy's cup of rebellion

is full, a number of your brothers and fellow servants will yet be killed as you were." This was the fifth period of the gospel's controversy with the world.

12. Then the Lamb broke the sixth seal. The earth shook, the sun stopped shining, and the moon looked as if it had been dipped in blood.

13. The stars of heaven fell as thick and fast as unripe figs fly out from a tree when it's shaken by a strong wind.

14. But this seemed to be only an early warning to the inhabitants of the earth of what was yet to come. Soon the whole atmosphere seemed to disappear as if someone rolled it up like a carpet. Mountains were sinking out of sight and whole islands were disappearing.

15. Then kings, heads of governments, political figures, military commanders, the rich and the famous, the powerful, and all other men, whether oppressed or free, who had turned against God, hid themselves in caves and behind rocks.

16. They then shouted to the mountains and rocks and said, "Fall on us and hide us from the One who is sitting on the throne and from the power of the Lamb.

17. Who can stand against God and his Son? We now face the consequences of what we have done." This was the sixth period of the gospel's controversy with the world.

CHAPTER 7

1. Then I saw what happened between the time the early warning had first been given and the actual end itself. I saw four angels holding back the winds which threatened to blow in from the four directions of the compass to destroy everything there is on earth or on the sea.

2. I also saw another angel, who came flying in from the rising of the sun, carrying the Royal Seal of God. When he arrived, he called to the four angels whom God had given power to hold back the destroying winds and said,

3. "Hold back the winds of destruction and don't let them blow full force on the earth, on the sea, or on any vegetation, so people might live until I have marked and sealed those who are God's servants."

4. Then a voice told me that one hundred and forty-four thousand would be chosen from all the tribes of spiritual Israel, like the first fruit from a harvest, to be marked and sealed:

5. Twelve thousand each from the tribes of Judah, Reuben, and Gad.

6. There would also be twelve thousand each from the tribes of Asher, Naphtali, and Manasseh.

7. Then there would be twelve thousand each from the tribes of Simeon, Levi, and Issachar.

8. And to complete the number there would be twelve thousand each from the tribe of Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. These are the ones who will stand in the presence of the Lamb and are representative of the harvest to be reaped in the last days.

9. Next I saw the results of this harvest. There were so many people, I couldn't even count them! When they stood together, they looked like a small nation! They had been taken from every race, tribe, nationality, and language. They were all dressed in white as they stood in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, and they had palm branches in their hands as a sign of their victory.

10. They praised God, saying, "Our salvation came from the One who sits on the throne and from the Lamb."

11. Then all the angels, the twenty-four elders, and the four living beings fell to their knees, bowed in worship, and praised the One sitting on the throne,

12. saying, "Amen! Praise, honor, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, and power and might belong to our God forever and ever and ever! Amen!"

13. After this, one of the twenty-four elders came and asked me, "Do you know who these special people are who are dressed in white with victory palms in their hands?"

14. I answered and said, "Sir, I'm sure you know. I don't." He said to me, "These are the people who came out of great tribulation and successfully withstood the test of the last days and remained loyal to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. They have set their minds to trust

God and have cleansed their hearts with the blood of the Lamb. That's why they're dressed in white and have victory palms in their hands.

15. That's why they're here before the throne, because they're God's special people. They will always serve Him, and He will bring joy to them by His presence.

16. Never again will they be hungry or thirsty, be scorched by the sun, or be persecuted as they have been.

17. The Lamb, who is before the throne, will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to the quiet springs of life-giving water, and God Himself will be there to wipe away the tears from their eyes." I was shown all this as being part of the sixth period of the gospel's history.

CHAPTER 8

1. After this, I saw the Lamb break open the last seal, and there was a moment of silence throughout the universe. Every being in the heavens stopped to show his respect and gratitude to the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb for what They had done. The controversy between Christ and Satan had finally come to an end.

2. **Then** the scene changed and I saw seven angels stand before God. Each of them was given a trumpet of judgment.

3. As I looked, I saw an angel come up to the altar that was in front of the throne with a golden censer in his hand. He then poured the incense from his censer on the coals of the golden altar,

4. and as he did so, the smoke of the incense rose up toward the One who sat on the throne. I was told that the incense represented the prayers of the saints, brought as an offering to God.

5. Then the angel filled the empty censer with hot coals from the same altar and threw the censer down to the earth. As soon as it hit, I heard distant rumblings of thunder, I saw flashes of lightning, and I noticed the earth around Calvary and Jerusalem being shaken by a strong earthquake.

6. This alerted the seven angels who had been given the seven trumpets of God's judgments to get ready to sound.

7. Then the first angel blew his judgment trumpet, and hordes of men from the North were allowed to attack the Roman Empire. The destruction caused by these armies was shown to me to be like the devastation caused by large hailstones and by balls of lightning rolling over a field in time of harvest. I saw that the hailstones were colored with drops of blood which symbolized the loss of many lives. When the Northern hordes were finished, one-third of the empire was engulfed in flames. The armies scorched the earth and set the trees and the grass on fire wherever they went.

8. Then the second angel blew his judgment trumpet, and a host of ships was allowed to sail up from the South to attack the Roman Empire. These attacks were shown to me to be as devastating as if a mountain covered with hot, flowing lava had been picked up and thrown into a seaport full of ships. A third of the empire's seaports turned red from the blood of the sailors.

9. One-third of all the fish in the harbors died. And by the time it was all over, the empire had lost one-third of its navy.

10. Then the third angel blew his judgment trumpet, and hordes of men were allowed to sweep in from the East to attack the Roman Empire. This action was shown to me to be as devastating as if an enormous meteor burning like a torch had dropped from the sky and damaged one-third of the earth's water supply.

11. The meteor was rightly called Bitterness. One-third of the empire's people suffered as a result of these attacks from the East, and many of the people died in bitterness and rage.

12. Then the fourth angel blew his judgment trumpet, and the Roman government was allowed to be attacked from within. This action was shown to me to be as if the sun, the moon, and the stars had stopped shining for a third of the time. The suffering on man and beast and the effects on nature would be impossible to describe. These four attacks on the Roman Empire from the North, the South, the East, and from within led to its collapse, and it came to its end. These judgments were

similar to the seven last plagues which will fall on the earth in the last days.

13. As I looked, I saw an eagle soaring high overhead, crying with a human voice, "Woe, woe, woe, to you people on earth, because history is not yet over, and three more angels need to blow their judgment trumpets!"

CHAPTER 9

1. Then the fifth angel blew his judgment trumpet, and during the first woe, the newly formed Holy Roman Empire was allowed to be attacked by riders from the East. The swiftness and fierceness of their attacks were shown to me to be like a burning meteor streaking through the sky. I was told that this meteor represented Satan, who was inspiring these hordes of riders and had the key to all of this.

2. I saw Satan go up to a dark and troublesome pit and open it, and when he did, out poured billows of smoke as from a huge furnace, so that it darkened the sun and poisoned the atmosphere.

3. Suddenly out of this billowing smoke came swarms of riders like swarms of locusts, and they stung people with a sting like that of scorpions. These hordes were allowed to sweep westward clear across North Africa and up into southern Europe.

4. But they were kept from destroying everyone because some people did have God's seal of approval and He protected them. It was as miraculous as if an invading army had been kept from hurting the grass, the trees, and certain special plants while engaged in war.

5. These hordes of men were not allowed to stamp out God's truth, but were allowed to inflict pain on the empire like the pain that comes from the sting of a scorpion.

6. It was during this time that many of God's servants preferred death to life, but death was not allowed to come.

7. The locusts I saw coming out of the smoke looked to me as large as horses ready for war. On their backs I saw riders, and they wore what looked like golden crowns.

8. Their hair was tied in the back like

women tie their hair, and their teeth looked as fearsome as those of a lion.

9. Each rider's chest was covered with an iron breastplate. And the sound of the wings of these locusts was like the sound of a thousand chariots being driven into battle.

10. These fierce-looking animals with their riders could sting people as scorpions do with their tails. What I saw looked like an indestructible army, but these men were permitted to destroy for only a relatively short time.

11. And these riders had a king over them who is the same one who rules over the dark and troublesome pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek it's Apollyon, which means "the destroyer."

12. This ends the period of the fifth trumpet and the first of the three woes, and there are still two more woes to come.

13. Then the sixth angel blew his judgment trumpet and the second woe began. And I heard a voice that seemed to come out of the four corners of the golden altar standing before the throne.

14. This voice said to the sixth angel, who had just blown his trumpet, "Go quickly and tell the four angels assigned to guard the river Euphrates--which I was told symbolized people--to end their watch and do what they were told."

15. So the four angels were relieved of their duty for a certain period specified in hours, days, months, and years. During this time, one-third of the people are to be destroyed by destroying armies.

16. The number of troops the angels were allowed to let come and attack the Holy Roman Empire was more than ten thousand times ten thousand.

17. Then I saw the horses coming, and I noticed that each rider had on a breastplate which reflected the sun and looked like it was made of fire. The horses looked like lions ready for the kill. When they breathed, fire, smoke, and poisonous fumes seemed to come out of their mouths.

18. They were allowed to sweep in from the East across many nations and on toward central Europe. By these judgments, a third of the people would be killed by fire, smoke, or sulphur, which seemed to

be coming out of the horses' mouths.

19. The power of these horses was evident from the way they held their heads and their tails. Their tails were tied so they looked like flying serpents, and the riders on their horses were not only allowed to wound, but also to kill.

20. Now those who did not die from these fierce attacks still continued to worship their holy relics of gold, silver, bronze, stone, or wood, none of which can hear, see, speak, or walk to do the people any good.

21. And they would not repent of killing others whom they called heretics, or of their use of magic arts, their immorality, their thefts, and their robberies. This ended the judgment of the sixth trumpet and second woe.

CHAPTER 10

1. Next I saw a mighty angel come down from heaven, and soon I realized that it was the Son of God. He was draped in a white cloud and a rainbow was arched over His head. His face was as bright as the sun and His feet looked like they were on fire.

2. He was holding a little open scroll in His hand. And as He touched the earth, He set His right foot on the sea and His left foot on the land.

3. Then He gave a great shout, like when a lion roars, and His shout seemed to awaken the whole world. It was followed by seven thunders, and each thunder had a different meaning.

4. I started to write it down, but a voice from heaven said to me, "Don't write down the meaning of the seven thunders, because it's during this time that the faith of God's people will be tested."

5. Then the Son of God, whom I saw standing with one foot on the sea and with the other foot on the land, raised His right hand toward heaven and took an oath.

6. He swore by the One who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, who created everything in the heavens, in the earth, and in the sea, and He said in a loud voice, "Time prophecy is at an end! There will be no more delay in finishing the work of God!"

7. When the seventh angel blows his judgment trumpet, it will signal the beginning of God's final work in the world, and the work will be finished according to His veiled plan just as the prophets said it would."

8. Then the voice from heaven, which told me not to write down the meaning of the seven thunders, spoke to me again and said, "Go and take the little, open scroll out of the hand of the Mighty Angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

9. So I went up to the Son of God and asked Him if I could have the little scroll, and He said to me, "You may have it. Take the little scroll and feed on its message. When you do, you will find that it will taste sweet to your mouth, but be sour to your stomach."

10. Then I reached out and took the little scroll from His hand and started to eat it. And just as He had said, it tasted sweet to my mouth, but became sour to my stomach.

11. Then He said to me, "This means God's people will be happy to hear that the end is near, but they will have many trials and much pain. However, they must still take the good news of my last work to the whole world, to every race, language, nationality, and people."

CHAPTER 11

1. Then the Son of God, who stood with one foot on the sea and with the other foot on the land, gave me a yardstick and said to me, "Go, it's time to measure those who make up the living temple of God. Draw their attention to the Sanctuary in heaven where God is, and then measure their attitude as they worship in His presence and present to Him their petitions.

2. Don't measure the attitude of those who are still standing in the courtyard and make no claims to know the full truth about the heavenly Sanctuary. This truth has been stepped on for forty-two prophetic months, that is, for one thousand two hundred and sixty years, during the last two woes. It's time for it to be restored.

3. Yet during these one thousand two hundred and sixty years I continued to give power to my two faithful witnesses,

and they survived and did share the truth about God with all those who would listen."

4. Then I was told that the two witnesses represented God's word as found in the Scriptures, and are like two lamps, which get their power from the oil of the two olive trees that I saw stand in the presence of God.

5. No one had power to stop these witnesses from saying what they were told to say. And if anyone dared harm them, fire would come down from heaven and consume their foes like in the days of Elijah. No one could destroy them, but if they tried, they would be destroyed.

6. In the past, some were given power through these witnesses to vindicate God. When Elijah said it would stop raining on Israel for three and a half years, it did. And through them Moses had power to turn waters into blood and to strike the country of Egypt with ten plagues. And these same witnesses will be given power in the last days to bring judgment on the whole world.

7. When the two witnesses were getting ready to proclaim the truth about the heavenly Sanctuary, as commissioned by the Son of God, the one in charge of the bottomless pit of sin stirred up the people against them, and like wild animals they attacked these two witnesses to kill them, to silence them forever.

8. Their bodies lay in the street of a great city, and like Sodom and Egypt, this city, too, rejected the word of God, and in that sense, it crucified the Lord all over again.

9. I noticed that as these two witnesses lay in the streets, people from different races, languages, and nationalities laughed at them and would not even give them an honorable burial. This lasted for about three and a half years.

10. People celebrated the death of these two witnesses and even sent presents to each other over it. They were glad, because the two witnesses had made them uncomfortable pointing out their sins.

11. But after three and a half years, the Holy Spirit came and breathed life into the two witnesses. And when they stood up,

the people were terrified at what they saw.

12. Then a voice from heaven spoke to the two witnesses and said, "Come up here!" They were then lifted off the earth and up into the clouds, and all this happened while their enemies stood by and watched.

13. About this same time, there was a great earthquake which destroyed a large part of another great city and thousands of people were killed, and the rest of the people were terribly afraid and asked the God of heaven to save them.

14. Now, although the second woe had ended long before this, and I had been given a glimpse into the troubles that would test the faith of God's people during the seven thunders, the third woe was still ahead.

15. **Then** I heard the seventh angel blow his judgment trumpet, and the third and last woe began. I heard voices coming out of heaven, saying, "The rulership of the world will now return to the Lord our God and to His Messiah, and He will rule it throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity."

16. The twenty-four elders, whom I saw sitting on thrones, slipped to their knees, bowed low before the throne, and worshiped God, saying,

17. "We thank you, Lord. You are the Almighty God, the One who is, who was, and who will always be. We thank you for deciding to take back your rightful power and once again rule the earth.

18. The wicked are angry because the time has come for you to act, to judge the dead, and to reward those who proclaimed your message so faithfully, and all your people both small and great. The time has come for you to destroy those who are destroying the world and everything in it."

19. Then God's Temple in heaven was opened, and I saw the ark of His covenant standing in the Most Holy Place. And there were flashes of lightning, loud voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake that shook the whole world, and huge hailstones. This was a glimpse ahead to the plagues that will fall on the kingdoms of this world. This ended the vision of the seventh judgment trumpet, which was the third and

last woe.

CHAPTER 12

1. **Next**, before I was given a look behind the scenes, I saw a mysterious sight appear in the sky, a woman dressed in white and flooded by the light of the sun. She was standing on the moon, and on her head she had a crown with twelve stars.

2. She was pregnant and looked as if she would soon give birth. Then I heard her cry out in pain, for her time had come to deliver.

3. I saw another mysterious sight in the sky, a huge red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and seven golden crowns, one on each head.

4. He had an enormously large and powerful tail. As I looked, I saw him use his tail to pull down one-third of the stars from heaven. The dragon, I was told, represented Satan, and the stars were the angels that he had pulled down from heaven with him. I saw him walk up to the woman and wait for her to give birth, so he could eat her child as soon as it was born.

5. She gave birth to a baby boy who was to rule and judge the whole world, and the baby was snatched away from the dragon, first to Egypt and later to God's throne in heaven.

6. Next I saw the woman run away from the dragon and into the wilderness, to a place God had picked out for her, where she was taken care of for one thousand two hundred and sixty years. And I was told that the woman represented God's chosen people.

7. This controversy between God and the dragon began years ago in heaven. God's Son, Michael, and the loyal angels fought against the dragon and his angels.

8. And the dragon and his angels were defeated. No more would they have a place in heaven.

9. The great dragon that was cast out with his angels is none other than Satan, that ancient serpent also called the devil. He is the same one who deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden and is out to deceive the whole world.

10. Then the scene changed and I

seemed to be at Calvary. I heard voices from all over heaven, saying, "Now we see the love of God and the nature of His kingdom!" Soon other voices joined in and said, "Now is Satan, the accuser of our brothers, who accused them before God day and night, completely cast out from the sympathies of the universe."

11. Again the scene changed, and I heard these same voices and they said, "The believers overcame the accuser by their faith in the Lamb and by the power of God's word. They courageously gave their testimony and did not shrink from death, but willingly died for Him who loved them."

12. I heard a voice say, "Rejoice you angels and you who dwell in the heavens, but woe to those who live on the earth and ride on ships in the sea, because the devil is now extremely angry and is coming at you with great fury. He is filled with rage because he knows that his time is short."

13. Then the scene changed back to the woman flooded with the sun and the huge red dragon. When the dragon saw that he was cast out of the sympathies of heaven, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child as he had never pursued her before.

14. But God helped the woman by giving her two large wings, which she then used to fly into the wilderness to escape from the wrath of the dragon. There she would be safe for times, time, and half a time, that is, for three and a half years as you count prophetic time, that is, for the next one thousand two hundred and sixty years.

15. When the dragon saw that the woman was running into the wilderness, he opened his mouth and a flood of people came out. They all went in search of the woman to try to find her, to kill her.

16. The isolated places to which she fled were kind to the woman. They opened up their mouths and swallowed up those who were after her, so the people of the dragon could not destroy her.

17. After not succeeding, the dragon was even more furious. So he decided to attack her last offspring, those who love the Lord keep His commandments, and

proclaim to the world the message that the Holy Spirit had confirmed among them. This look behind the scene helped me to better understand the events of the last days and the role of the dragon.

CHAPTER 13

1. Then I was given a vision of the last days. I looked and saw the dragon standing on a seashore expectantly looking out over the water. Suddenly I saw a gigantic sea creature come up out of the water and it looked like something I had never seen before. In some ways, it looked like the great red dragon. It also had seven heads and ten horns, but ten crowns, one crown on each horn. Also, there were words branded on each head, which were words of blasphemy against God.

2. This gigantic sea creature had the body of a leopard, the paws of a bear, and each of its heads had the mouth and jaws of a lion. Then the dragon gave the sea creature unusual powers, a political kingdom from which to rule, and great spiritual authority. And the dragon used the sea creature to deceive and to persecute God's people.

3. The scene changed and I saw one of the heads of the sea creature suddenly go limp as if it had been fatally wounded. This greatly affected the sea creature and it looked as if it would bleed to death. Then suddenly the wound healed and the creature was well again. Then I saw the sea creature begin to walk the earth. Everywhere it went, people were hypnotized by its charm and did whatever it told them to do.

4. Soon they worshiped the creature and said to each other, "Which other creature is as powerful as the sea creature, and who would dare to fight against it?" But they didn't realize that by worshiping the creature, they were worshiping the dragon that gave the creature its power.

5. The sea creature made all sorts of religious claims for itself, and even blasphemed God by claiming to speak for God. It exercised some of this power for forty-two prophetic months, or one thousand two hundred and sixty years.

6. The creature continued to blas-

pHEME God, to misuse His name, and to undermine the truth of His Sanctuary. And it even claimed to have power over the angels in heaven.

7. The creature also attacked God's people here on earth and killed many of them. And it soon exercised its power over every language, race, and nation.

8. All people on earth eventually worshiped the creature, except those whose names were written in the Book of Life belonging to the Lamb that was destined to be slain from before the creation of the world.

9. Those who read this book that I, John, am writing, should pay close attention to the meaning of its symbols.

10. Any political or religious system which imprisons God's people will lose its own freedom. Any such system which pursues God's people to kill them will be destroyed. The coming of the Lord will be delayed, and this will call for special endurance and faith on the part of God's people.

11. Then I was given another vision. This time I saw a huge, heavy-chested, four-footed animal come up out of the ground, instead of up out of the sea. It had only two small horns, like the horns of a lamb, but it had the potential of a dragon, and it soon began to speak as one.

12. This huge land-animal began to admire the sea creature. And it decided to imitate the creature and control the consciences of people just as the creature had done. So the land-animal used its power to make everyone in the world listen to the creature whose wound had been healed.

13. The animal did incredible things to make people worship the creature. And the dragon also helped the animal, even doing such miraculous things as making fire come down from heaven in the sight of men as Elijah did on Mt. Carmel.

14. The animal did everything under the supervision of the creature. It led the nations of the world to unite and to imitate the creature that had been wounded by the sword and did not die.

15. The animal had power to breathe life into this new global unity, and the nations spoke with one voice and threat-

ened with death all those who would not worship the creature.

16. And everyone from the least to the greatest, whether they were rich or poor, free or bond, had to agree to accept the mark of the creature by doing what it told them to do.

17. After this, no one could buy or sell anything unless he could prove his loyalty by worshiping the creature at the time it had decided on. Now the sea creature can be easily identified, because its title-name makes into a number.

18. This calls for more than human wisdom, but with spiritual insight anyone can know the title-name of the sea creature by knowing the time it sets for worship. And its title-name makes into the number six hundred sixty-six, and this is the name of a man, not a creature.

CHAPTER 14

1. **Again** the scene changed and I looked and saw the Lamb standing on Mt. Zion surrounded by one hundred and forty-four thousand saints, who had refused to accept the mark of the creature, but instead had chosen to accept the mark of the Lamb so that everyone could see that they belonged to the Father.

2. Then I heard voices coming from heaven, which sounded like a mighty waterfall accompanied by distant peals of thunder and by thousands of harps.

3. These were the voices of thousands and thousands of people. They were singing a new song which only the redeemed could sing. And they were singing this song to the One sitting on the throne, who had the four living beings and the twenty-four elders with Him. And those leading out in this new song were the one hundred and forty-four thousand, who were a part of the great harvest of the earth.

4. These were the people who had not corrupted themselves, but were as pure in their faith as virgins. They had faithfully followed the Lamb wherever He led them and were now being presented to Him and to God as first-fruits of the last great harvest.

5. These are people who were totally honest with God and with themselves and

had an attitude of obedience in everything they did. Therefore, they stood without a fault before the throne of God.

6. Then I had another vision, and I was taken back to earth and shown more of the final events. I saw an angel flying in the sky, carrying the last message of God's good news to every language, race, and nation.

7. He gave this good news in a loud voice for all the world to hear, saying, "Stand in awe of God and give glory to Him, because the time has come for Him to clear His name and to judge the world. Worship only Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water."

8. Then I saw another angel flying behind the first one, and he, too, gave his message in a loud voice for all the world to hear, saying, "Don't follow those who are not listening to the first angel. Their voice is that of Babylon! They are falling away from God and will soon be worshipping the creature!"

9. Then I noticed a third angel flying behind the first and second one, and he also gave his message in a loud voice for all the world to hear, saying, "Whoever agrees to worship the creature and to receive its mark, by doing what it asked him to do,

10. will have to suffer the consequences of eternal destruction. God will show no favoritism, and the Lamb and the angels will not save him.

11. The whole world will be consumed by fire. And during the plagues that will come on the earth, no one will find relief day or night who worships the creature, the animal, and the dragon by receiving their mark of loyalty."

12. These things will call for special endurance on the part of God's people, who are keeping the commandments of God and being faithful to Jesus.

13. Then a voice spoke to me from heaven and said, "Write this down: Blest are those who die in the Lord before the plagues fall, says the Spirit, for they will rest from their labors and the influence of what they have done will follow them."

14. Then the scene changed and I looked

up and saw in the distance a little, white cloud about the size of a man's hand. As the cloud came nearer, it grew larger and larger, and on it sat the Son of Man. On His head He had a golden crown, and in His hand He had a sharp sickle.

15. Next, I saw an angel come out of the heavenly Sanctuary and in a loud voice call to the One sitting on the huge cloud and said, "Use your sickle and reap, for the time to reap has come, and the inhabitants of the earth are ready to harvest."

16. Then from the cloud on which He sat, the Son of Man swung His sickle over the earth as a signal to the angels to reap the earth's harvest.

17. The angel who had come out of the Sanctuary in heaven also had a sharp sickle in his hand. He took charge and led the angels down to earth for the reaping.

18. Then the angel who had been in charge of the fire on the altar of incense came out of the heavenly Sanctuary and in a loud voice called after the angel with the sharp sickle and said, "Don't forget to use your sickle to cut the wild grapes from their vines, because they, too, need to be harvested."

19. So the angel with the sharp sickle came to earth and also harvested the wild grapes, and he threw them into the winepress of God's displeasure.

20. So God withdrew His Spirit from the earth, and there was a slaughter as the wicked turned on their leaders who had led them astray, and on each other. Blood was seen flowing everywhere. The earth looked like the ancient city of Babylon, whose river flowed red with blood when the Persian horses waded through it up to their bridles.

CHAPTER 15

1. Then I had another vision. As I looked, I saw a most amazing sight. Seven angels were being commissioned to carry the seven last plagues down to earth as the last expression of God's displeasure.

2. Also I saw what seemed to be a large expanse of water as smooth and as transparent as glass. And underneath the glass were flickering lights like flames of fire. As I looked, I saw those who had

gained the victory over the dragon, over the creature with its number, and over the animal which imitated it, all standing on the sea of glass playing their harps.

3. They were singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, the same one which the children of Israel sang after they had crossed the Red Sea. It was a song of deliverance, and they sang to the Lord, saying, "Great and wonderful are your works, Lord God Almighty. Righteous and true are your ways, King of Nations.

4. Who will not stand in awe of you? Who will not glorify your name? You are the Holy One. All peoples and nations will come and kneel before you. They will have seen what you have done, and they will know that you have been gracious and just."

5. Then the Sanctuary in heaven was opened as a testimony that Christ's priestly ministry was over. And as I looked, I could see into the Most Holy Place.

6. Out of the Sanctuary came seven angels, who had been commissioned to take the seven last plagues to the earth. They came out of the Sanctuary dressed in white robes with golden belts around their waists.

7. Before they left for earth, one of the four living beings standing by the throne handed each of the seven angels a golden bowl. Each bowl was filled with one of the seven last plagues. These plagues were to express the displeasure of the One who sat on the throne with what He saw on earth. He is the One who always was and always will be.

8. Suddenly the throne room was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one could enter the Sanctuary again until the seven last plagues were over.

CHAPTER 16

1. Next I heard an authoritative voice come out of the smoke-filled Sanctuary. It spoke to the seven angels and said, "Go! Do your work quickly, and empty your seven bowls on the earth to express God's displeasure. These plagues will expose the last roots of man's rebellion."

2. So the first angel poured out his

bowl on the land mass of the earth. And the people who had agreed to receive the mark of the creature and the animal who had imitated it immediately broke out with sores all over their bodies.

3. The second angel quickly followed, and poured out his bowl on the lakes and oceans of the earth. And the waters stopped moving and became motionless and stagnant. They looked as red and still as the blood of a dead man, and every creature in the sea died.

4. Quickly the third angel followed, and he poured out his bowl on the rivers and fresh water supplies of the earth, and all of them turned into what looked like blood.

5. I heard this angel say, "Lord, you are just in your judgments. You have always done what is right, and you will continue to do so.

6. The inhabitants of the earth have already killed some of your people, and they're ready to kill them all. They were thirsting after their blood, so you gave them blood to drink."

7. Then I heard voices from under the altar in heaven respond and say, "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your ways."

8. The fourth angel quickly followed and poured out his bowl on the rays of the sun. The rays intensified and burned people so severely that they thought they were on fire.

9. And all the while they suffered, they cursed God for allowing this to happen. They would not acknowledge their rebellion and admit that His way was right.

10. Quickly the fifth angel followed and poured out his bowl on the creature's seat of power and plunged it into darkness. The darkness was so intense that the people bit their tongues in pain.

11. They, too, cursed God because of their pains and sores, and neither did they acknowledge their rebellion, nor that what they had done was wrong.

12. The sixth angel followed and quickly poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates. Immediately it dried up and was no longer a barrier to anyone. I was told that this removed the restraint

from men to kill the righteous. As the ancient kings of the East attacked the children of Israel, so now the people were allowed to attack the believers.

13. Then I saw three ugly frogs. One each came out of the mouth of the dragon, the creature, and the animal, which is also known as the false prophet. I was told that the frogs were symbols of unleashed demons.

14. These demons quickly fanned out over the whole world, working all kinds of miracles. And because of these miracles that the demons were able to perform, they were also able to persuade the authorities that God's people were responsible for all the troubles in the world. So then the authorities made a decree that with one bold stroke they would kill all of God's people. This led to the final battle between Almighty God and the forces of evil.

15. Those of you who will be reading this, listen to me. God promised to deliver you. He will come and rescue you as suddenly as a thief appears out of the night. But you need to stay awake and hold on to your faith, or you'll be without a spiritual robe to wear to the heavenly wedding.

16. Finally, the authorities set the date for all of God's people to be wiped out at one time. This is the battle called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

17. Quickly the seventh angel followed and poured out his bowl into the earth's atmosphere. As soon as he did so, the One who sat on the throne spoke from heaven and announced the coming of His Son. As His words were rolling through the earth, the righteous looked up and said, "Lo, this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us."

18. All across the sky were flashes of lightning, followed first by distant rumblings and then by loud peals of thunder. Then the earth shook as never before.

19. The efforts of the evil trinity of the dragon, the creature, and the animal came to an end. The global city with three parts that they tried to build collapsed. And when they wanted to wipe out all of God's people with one quick blow, they were stopped. The earth was totally destroyed,

just as was the ancient city of Babylon.

20. Islands disappeared, and whole mountains dropped out of sight.

21. This immense earthquake was followed by a global hailstorm with balls of ice weighing about one hundred pounds each. The hail fell on people everywhere. And they cursed God for allowing the hail to destroy everything they had worked so hard to build. When the storm was over, the earth looked like a wilderness.

CHAPTER 17

1. **Then** one of the seven angels which had been given the seven golden bowls spoke to me and said, "Come, let me show you the reason for the judgment of the sea creature. The creature was like an attractive prostitute sitting on the beach by many waters.

2. The world's authorities courted her favors and everyone on earth admired her. They listened to her, followed her lead, and toasted her success with her own wine."

3. The next thing I knew, the Holy Spirit took hold of me, and I was carried into the desert. There I saw this same woman sitting on a huge red animal, which had insults to God written all over it. This red animal had seven heads and ten horns just as the dragon and the creature did, but no crowns.

4. The woman was dressed in purple and red, and was wearing all kinds of jewelry made of gold, diamonds, and pearls. In her hand she was holding a golden cup full of her adulteries and other filthy things.

5. She had names written on her forehead such as: "Babylon the Great," "Mother of Prostitutes," "Global Priestess of Self Worship."

6. I also noticed that the woman had been drinking. She was drunk with power, and like a mad queen, she had killed and tortured many of God's people simply because they had put their faith in Jesus and not in her. And I was shocked by what I saw.

7. Then the angel who accompanied me said, "Why are you so shocked? Let me tell you a little more about the secret

life of this woman and about the red animal with its seven heads and ten horns that she sits on.

8. What you just saw is symbolic. The animal on which the woman is sitting represents a political system, which was once very powerful, then lost its power, and then got it back again. It became so powerful that it influenced the whole world to turn away from God, and that's why God had to step in and destroy it and those who worshiped it. And everyone whose name was not recorded in the Book of Life, which the Lamb has kept since the beginning of this world, had ended up worshipping this huge red animal.

9. To identify this animal calls for more than human wisdom. Here are some clues: The seven heads represent seven hills on which the woman sits and where the political system has its center.

10. The seven heads also represent seven powers, which over the long centuries have attacked God's people. By this time five of these will have come and gone, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes, he will rule for only a short time.

11. Now the one behind all these powers is the eighth king, and therefore part of the seven, and he's now fast heading for his own destruction.

12. The ten horns on top of the seven heads represent the earthly powers of the last days. They have not yet united, but they will unite, with the woman, for one prophetic hour.

13. They will be of one mind and will throw their power and support behind the woman, because they will admire what she's doing to bring peace to the earth.

14. And to preserve their world, they will even go as far as to fight against the Lamb, the Lord of lords and King of kings, by attacking His followers."

15. Then the angel pointed to the waters on which the prostitute on the red animal sat and said, "These waters by which you saw her sitting represent masses of people from every race and nation on the globe.

16. The ten horns on the seven heads of the red animal represent the united pow-

ers of the earth, which suddenly turn on the prostitute, strip her naked, expose her body, and then set her on fire.

17. God allowed these earthly powers to be of one mind and to give their power and authority to the woman, because she wanted to sit as a queen and rule the world. So he let her rule for a short time to show the earthly powers what her rule would be like, and He has kept His word.

18. Now the symbol of an attractive prostitute was used to show you the charm of the sea creature and the seductive influence it had over all the nations of the earth. The woman also symbolizes the global city that took in all the kings of the earth."

CHAPTER 18

1. **Then** I had another vision with still more of the final events. The scene changed and I saw an angel come down from heaven having great power and authority. As he approached the earth, his presence bathed the whole world in a brilliant light. I was told that this angel carried with him the final call of God's last message.

2. He cried out in a loud voice for all the world to hear, "The great global city has become like Babylon. She's fallen so low that she's beyond reform. She's become the home of demons. And every kind of foul spirit and hateful bird of prey lives inside her borders.

3. Every nation on earth has drunk her wine of lust and committed adultery with her. And the world's businessmen have grown rich from her lust for luxuries."

4. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Listen to me, my people. Come out of this great city. Get away from her before you're caught by her charms. Come out before you begin to share in the prostitute sins and then receive of her plagues!

5. Her sins are fast reaching the end of God's mercy and grace. He has not forgotten what she has done to His people.

6. She will be treated just as she treated them. Let her feel the anger of the nations as they turn against her. Let them give her a drink twice as strong as she gave them.

7. Let her suffer in proportion to the glory and luxury she indulged herself in.

She boasts and says, 'I'm a queen of nations. I'm not a poor widow. With my riches I will never see poverty, nor will I ever have pain.'

8. But in one short prophetic day, the plagues will overtake her, and she'll be surrounded by death, disease, and famine. She'll cry out as if trapped in a fire, because the Lord God removed His protecting mercy, her probation closed, and the day of her judgment has come.

9. Then the nations of the earth, who took part in her immoral practices and enjoyed her favors, will weep. Everywhere businessmen will weep because of the fires that ravaged and destroyed the global city they have helped to build.

10. They will stand back in amazement and fear and will say to each other, 'Oh, no! Our great city, the city that was so mighty, has come to ruin in so short a time!'

11. Merchants everywhere will weep because they can no longer sell their merchandise.

12. The city has no money to invest in silver and gold, or in gems and art pieces. She's no longer interested in buying their fabrics such as lavender and silk. She has stopped importing such treasures as ivory, bronze, marble, special metals, and rare woods.

13. She no longer cares about buying spices, exotic foods, rich perfumes, miracle ointments, and incense. She has stopped trading in beer, wine, liquor, oil, flour, wheat, cattle, sheep, horses, and in the latest carriage. And she is no longer able to employ skilled and unskilled labor from other places.

14. The world's business people will say to her, 'All the good things you produced as well as those things you bought from us to satisfy your demands for luxury are gone. All your investments and wealth are gone, and we can see that you'll never recover.'

15. Those businessmen who did become rich from trading with her will be afraid of the suffering that will follow.

16. They will cry out and say, 'Oh, no! The great global city, which loved to dress in lavender and red, and to cover herself

with gold and diamonds and pearls,

17. has in so short a time lost all her wealth!' And all the sea captains and their wealthy passengers, the sailors, and all the others who earn their living by ships will stand back and weep.

18. When they see the great city go up in smoke they will say, 'There was no city like this magnificent city!'

19. They will throw dust in the air as an expression of their grief, and they will weep and mourn, saying, 'Oh, no! How terrible! The great global city is gone! The city which kept our ships sailing and made us rich has been destroyed! And all this has come to an end in so short a time!'

20. Rejoice, those of you who live throughout God's universe! Rejoice, those of you who serve God here on earth! Rejoice, those of you who were apostles and prophets and have spoken out against her sins! God has permitted the great city to be treated just as she treated you."

21. Then I looked and saw a powerful angel pick up a huge stone shaped like a millstone used in harvesting, and with a demonstration of great violence, threw it into the ocean. As he did so, he said to the city, "You will be thrown down as violently as this stone, and you will sink out of sight, never again to be seen.

22. The sound of your music, whether produced by your orchestras with their harps, flutes, and trumpets, or by your drums and guitars, will never be heard again. The activities of your craftsmen and technicians will stop. All your production lines will come to a standstill.

23. Never again will your streets be lighted at night, nor will they ever again hear the happy laughter of brides and bridegrooms. Your business people will no longer be the world's great men, nor will you lead the world astray by your technology and magic.

24. You will be destroyed because you were ready to destroy God's people, and shed their blood, just as others have done in the past."

CHAPTER 19

1. **After** this, I heard in vision what sounded like the shout of a great multi-

tude coming from heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation, glory, and power belong to the Lord our God!

2. True and honest and right are His decisions. He has given the death sentence to the city for misleading the world. He has allowed the prostitute to taste her own violence in killing God's people."

3. Then they shouted again and said, "Alleluia! Let the global city go up in smoke until she is gone forever!"

4. And the twenty-four elders and the four living beings knelt before the One sitting on the throne and before the Lamb and said, "Amen! Alleluia!"

5. Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, you who serve the Lord and reverence His name, whether you're small or great."

6. This was followed by a multitude of voices, which together sounded like the roar of a mighty waterfall, like distant rolling thunder. These voices spoke in unison and rose to a crescendo, saying, "Alleluia! The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!

7. Let us all be glad and rejoice and give honor to Him who sits on the throne, because the time has come for the Lamb to meet His bride and to bring her home. She's made herself ready and is waiting.

8. She's wearing that glorious white wedding gown that the Lamb gave her. She received it with gladness and has kept it white and clean by her right-doing."

9. Then my accompanying angel said to me, "Be sure to write this down: 'Blest and happy are those who have been called and have accepted God's invitation to the homecoming of the bride, and to the wedding feast to follow.'" Then the angel added, "This invitation from God is genuine and true."

10. When I heard this, I fell on my knees in front of the angel to thank him, but he raised me up and said, "Don't do that. Worship God, not me. I'm one of His servants, just as you are. I belong to those, who like you, hold on to the testimony given by Jesus, which comes from the prophetic gift."

11. Then the scene changed, and as I looked, it seemed as if the sky opened up.

Then I saw a rider on a white horse come galloping down to earth. I was told that the rider on the horse is called, Faithful and True. He has come to deliver His people and to rescue them from those who are about to kill them.

12. As I looked more closely, I noticed that His eyes blazed like fire, and He was wearing a triple crown, one on top of the other. He also had a name written across His chest, the meaning of which only He knew.

13. The robe He was wearing was as red as blood. I was told that He is also called The Living Word, and has come to fulfill His promise to His people.

14. A whole army of angels, all on white horses and dressed in clean, white robes, followed Him.

15. Out of His mouth came a beam of light, which looked like a sword. This is the sword He will use to stop the nations from destroying His people. He will use it as a shepherd uses his rod to protect his sheep. He will do His work as thoroughly as when people squeeze the juice out of grapes. He was asked by Almighty God to do all this, and to do it quickly.

16. On both sides of His robe, along the sides of His thighs, were these names: on one side was written King of kings, and on the other side, Lord of lords.

17. Then I saw an angel standing in the sky illuminated by the sun. He shouted in a loud voice to all the vultures under heaven and said, "Come! I have a feast for you. God's withdrawal of mercy has made this feast possible.

18. Come! You'll be eating the dead flesh of kings and captains, of riders and their horses, of all kinds of people, those who were free and those who were not, those who were great and those who were not."

19. The scene changed and I saw the sea creature advising the nations of the world to use their armies to fight against the One on the white horse and against His army.

20. But the sea creature and the land-animal, called the false prophet, were taken prisoner. This is the false prophet who did marvelous things to convince people to

support the sea creature, and who forced them to receive its mark. This is the same false prophet who led the nations of the world to imitate the actions of the sea creature and to persecute God's people. So the creature and its false prophet were both thrown into the lake of fire to be annihilated, together with those who worshiped them.

21. The beam of light, which looked like a sword coming out of the mouth of the One sitting on the white horse, slew them, and the vultures came and ate their flesh.

CHAPTER 20

1. Then the scene changed and I saw an angel come down from heaven holding in his hand a large key and a huge chain, which I was told symbolized his power to bind.

2. And the angel took hold of the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, and bound him to this planet for a thousand years.

3. It was like throwing him into a dark pit from which he could not escape. So the angel confined him to this empty planet and isolated him from the rest of the universe so that he had no one to deceive until the thousand years were over. That's when the wicked will be raised to life, which is known as the second resurrection. Satan will then be free again, but only for a little while.

4. The scene changed, and I saw thrones in heaven, and those who sat on them were given authority to confirm the fate of the wicked. I saw those who had been beheaded for believing in Jesus and for holding to the word of God. I also saw those who had not worshiped the sea creature, nor the land-animal, and had not received the mark. All of these were there and shared the judgment seat with Christ for a thousand years.

5. They included those who were raised at the first resurrection. But the wicked remained dead all during the thousand years and were not resurrected until the thousand years were over.

6. Blest are those who had a share in the first resurrection. Over such the second death and final annihilation has no

power. But they will continue to serve as priests and witnesses for God and for Christ, and will share with Him the judgment of the wicked for a thousand years.

7. When the thousand years are over, God will free Satan from his imprisonment and end his isolation by resurrecting the wicked, as I said before.

8. And when Satan sees the wicked of all nations (often referred to as Gog and Magog) fill the earth again, he springs into action. The number of the wicked from all ages is like the sand of the sea. Then he goes among them and persuades them to join him in a battle against the City of God, which had just come down out of heaven and settled on the earth.

9. The wicked listen, and under his leadership, surround the camp of the saints to take it. But as they launch their attack on the city, God's presence appears in the sky and fire comes down from heaven and consumes them all.

10. And Satan, who had deceived them to make this last move, was also consumed in the lake of fire together with the sea creature and the land-animal known as the false prophet. They all perished, and sin and sinners were no more.

11. Now, before the wicked were destroyed, I saw a great white throne. The form of the One who sat on it was so radiant that the earth and the sky seemed to flee from His very presence.

12. Then all the wicked who had been resurrected, whether they had been great or not, stood together with Satan in front of the One sitting on the throne. The Book of Life was opened for the righteous and the Book of Death for the wicked. Then the wicked saw their lives replayed before them and before the universe, and they understood why they were not allowed to live, for they were judged by what they had done.

13. Everyone who ever lived was there, even those who had been buried at sea and those who had been buried on land. All were present to hear the final word from the One who sat on the throne. This was the last great judgment, and all were judged by what they had done. Then everyone bowed before the throne and ac-

knowledge that God was just.

14. Then fire came down from God out of heaven, and consumed them all. And death and the grave were also thrown into this lake of fire, which is called the second death. This same fire cleansed the whole earth, and then God re-created it in the sight of the righteous, doing it just as He had done in the beginning.

15. Yes, anyone whose name was not recorded in the Book of Life was consumed forever by the lake of fire.

CHAPTER 21

1. **One** last time the scene changed and I saw a new earth and a new sky. The old earth with its old sky was gone, as were the big oceans.

2. I saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, come down out of heaven from God, like a bride, beautifully dressed, ready to meet her husband.

3. I heard a loud voice coming from the throne, saying, "God will now make His home on earth. He will personally live with His people and be with them. They will be part of the Royal Family of God because they are His.

4. He will wipe away all their tears. There will be no more death, neither will there be any more sorrow, crying, grief, or pain. Everything hurtful will be forgotten."

5. Then the One who sat on the throne spoke and said, "I have made all things new!" And He said to me, "Write down everything you saw, because it's true."

6. He said, "It's done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and End. I will make those who long for rest to lie down in green pastures, and lead those who are thirsty beside springs of still waters. And the Water of Life is free to all.

7. I will welcome each one home as a loving father welcomes his son. I will give him his inheritance, because he is my son and I am his Father.

8. But those who rejected me, who didn't believe what I told them, who were ashamed of me, and who continued lying, cheating, killing, committing adultery,

playing with the demonic, and worshipping themselves and their own idols, had to suffer the consequences of their sins. They were consumed by the flames of the lake of fire, which is the second death."

9. Then one of the seven angels which had been given one of the seven bowls, holding one of the seven last plagues, spoke to me and said, "Come, let me show you the New City, also called the Bride of the Lamb, which was made for God's people."

10. Then the Spirit carried me away to the top of a very high mountain and showed me the New City, which had come down from heaven.

11. The whole city reflected the glorious light of God and looked like a huge diamond glistening in the sun. I could see right through the city, because it was as clear as crystal and as transparent as glass. When Jesus returned to earth at the end of the thousand years, His feet first touched the Mount of Olives, and the mountain split and became a great plain. This is where the city settled.

12. From where I was, I could look down on the city and see that it had a wall around it with twelve gates and an angel at each one of the gates. Above each gate was inscribed the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

13. I noticed that there were three gates on each side of the city, three on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west.

14. The whole city and its wall rested on twelve foundations, each one having the name of one of the twelve apostles inscribed on it.

15. Then my accompanying angel took a golden yardstick in his hand and measured the city, its gates, and the wall.

16. Now the city was laid out in a square. Its length was the same as its width, and it measured one thousand five hundred miles along each wall.

17. Then the angel measured the wall, and it was two hundred feet high. The measurement the angel used was the same kind of measurement that humans use.

18. The color of the wall was deep green and built out of jasper. Everything inside

the city was as light and transparent as glass and yet pure gold.

19. The foundations supporting the city and the wall were made of all kinds of precious stones. The first foundation was deep green and made of jasper to match the wall. The second was deep blue and made of sapphire. The third was milky white and made of chalcedony. The fourth was bright green and made of emerald.

20. The fifth was reddish pink and made of sardonyx. The sixth was reddish orange and made of carnelian. The seventh was bright yellow and built of chrysolite. The eighth was deep blue and built of beryl. The ninth was pale blue and made of topaz. The tenth was gold colored and made of chrysoprasus. The eleventh was red and made of jacinth. And the twelfth foundation was purple and made of amethyst.

21. I noticed that each of the twelve gates was made of one huge pearl. And the streets of the city were pure gold, yet they were as transparent as glass.

22. But I didn't see the Temple in the New Jerusalem because, there was no need of a Temple to worship in, for God and the Lamb were personally there. The Temple I was looking for was located outside the city as a reminder of what God had done.

23. The city was so bright and full of light that no one needed the sun or the moon to light it. The radiance of God and of the Lamb flooded the city with their light.

24. The city was made for the redeemed of this world, and people from all nations will walk in its light. They will serve God and the Lamb as kings over other worlds throughout the vast spaces of the universe. And each will bring his own glory into the city.

25. The gates of the city will never be closed. They will not have to be locked at night, and there's no darkness there.

26. The honor and greatness of the city will be its people, who have come from all the nations of earth.

27. No one who is impure will be allowed to enter, nor anyone who is wicked or dishonest, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

CHAPTER 22

1. **Then** my accompanying angel drew my attention to a river, clear as crystal, called The River of Life. It flowed out from the throne of God and the Lamb.

2. And from the throne it gently flowed through the middle of the city. Also I noticed the Tree of Life spanning the river with part of its trunk on both sides. I was told that the tree bore twelve kinds of fruit a year, one new fruit every month. And its leaves were for the healing of God's people.

3. No one will sin again. The only reminder of sin will be the scars on the hands and feet of the Son of God. The people there will love and worship God forever.

4. They will see Him face to face, and will be able look at Him as little children look into the face of a loving father. They will always remember what He did for them.

5. And there will be no night there, so no one will need any candles. The Lord God will light the city with His presence, and shed His light into every heart. And they will help Him rule His universe throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity.

6. Then the angel who had shown me all these things said, "Everything that you saw in vision is true and the words you're writing down can be trusted. You were guided by the Holy Spirit, who has inspired the prophets through the ages and now He has shown you what must take place.

7. What you have written down is mainly for those who are living in the end. To them Jesus is saying, 'I'm coming sooner than you think. And when I come, you'll be glad that you held to the prophecies written in this book.'"

8. I, John, your brother in the faith, personally saw and heard all these things in vision. And after I had seen them, I was so overwhelmed that I fell on my knees in front of my angel.

9. But he quickly helped me to my feet and said, "You don't have to kneel in front of me. I'm just a servant of God like you are. I'm here to serve you as I served your brothers the prophets before you. And I

will also serve those who read and follow through on what you wrote. So let's worship God."

10. Then he said to me, "Don't close up and seal the prophecies of this book, because God's servants need to know when all these things will happen.

11. The time will come when he who is unjust will continue to be unjust, and he who is filthy will continue to be filthy. On the other hand, he who is doing what's right will continue to do right, and he who is living a holy life will continue to live a holy life. Everyone's character traits will be fixed forever."

12. Then Jesus spoke to me and said, "When I come, I will come quickly, and I will reward each person for what he has done.

13. I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

14. I, John, now know more than ever that those who are blest are those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and out of gratitude keep God's commandments. These are the ones who have the right to walk through the gates into the city and to eat from the Tree of Life.

15. But outside the city are the wicked, those who practice magic, who kill, who are immoral, who worship themselves and others, and who don't hesitate to lie whenever they need to.

16. Then Jesus said, "I have shown you all these things, and through my angel explained them to you, so you can write them down and share them with the churches. All the things that you have seen are true and will happen. I am the Root and the Descendant of David, and known as the bright Morning Star.

17. The Holy Spirit is working on people's hearts everywhere, inviting them to come; the city is beckoning people to come; and whoever accepts the messages in this book, let him invite others to come. Everyone who is thirsty can come and freely drink of the Water of Life."

18. I, John, now add my testimony. I warn everyone who reads or hears the prophetic words in this book, not to add anything different. If they do, God's seven last plagues will certainly fall on them.

19. And if anyone takes away any part of this book, and lessens the urgency of these prophetic messages, God will take away his right to the Holy City and to the Tree of Life, which are described in this book.

20. Jesus calls everyone to come to Him. And to those living in the last days, He says, "I will come sooner than you think!" I say, "So be it. Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly!"

21. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all of God's people. Amen.

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